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Uyghur Identity

Contestation and Construction of Identity in a Conflict Setting

ABSTRACT

This study explores and discusses the dynamics of identity in conflict through examining Uyghur collective identity in the specific context of China as an emerging power. Particular attention is paid to how this identity is constructed and contested by different actors of the Xinjiang Conflict. The Xinjiang Conflict is a multifaceted conflict, consisting of both direct and structural violence. These dynamics of identity are based on different understandings of what it means to be a Uyghur, which is in line with existing research on contemporary conflicts that considers identity as a driving force of violence. Through a text analysis, this study sets out to assess *how Uyghur identity is constructed and contested in the context of the Xinjiang Conflict*, by primary actors; the Chinese government, Uyghur diaspora and the local Uyghur population in Xinjiang. As the Uyghurs' identity has been contested, and discontent is cultivated among the Uyghur community, the conflict between Uyghurs and the Chinese government (dominated by the majority ethnic group Han Chinese) has escalated since the mid-1990s. The findings advanced in this research conclude that Uyghur identity, in the context of conflict, is contested within different areas, such as language, culture, territory, religion and even time. This paper suggests that within these areas, identity is contested though the different processes of negotiation, resistance, boundary-making and emphasis on certain features of ones identity.

Key words: *Xinjiang Conflict, China, Uyghur, Identity, and Text Analysis*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABBREVIATIONS

CCP – Chinese Communist Party

ETIM – East Turkestan Islamic Movement

ETPRP – East Turkestan People's Revolutionary Party

ETR – East Turkestan Republic

PRC – People's Republic of China

TIP – Turkestan Islamic Party

UAA – Uyghur American Association

UHRP – Uyghur Human Rights Project

WUC – World Uyghur Congress

XUAR – Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region

MAP OF CHINA[1]

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1 Lineback, Neil. *Maps101 News.* Accessed 9 May 2015
<http://demo.maps101.com/index.php?option=com_flexicontent&view=items&id=558:chinas-wild-west>

INTRODUCTION

PATTERNS OF CONFLICT AND IDENTITY

In June 2009, a decade long struggle in the northwest province of Xinjiang, People's Republic of China (PRC) reached unprecedented levels of violence when Uyghur protestors clashed with the Han Chinese population and the police in the provincial capital Urumqi. This violence followed the 'Strike Hard' punitive campaign executed by the Chinese government. This campaign included surveillances, raids and imprisonment of people engaging in 'terrorism, separatism, and extremism' – labelled the three evils, and had been an official policy since 1996 (Millward 2007:32). The state have since then used both public and private internal and external channels to place the blame for the increase in violence on extreme Islamist insurgency, and more specifically on alleged Uyghur terrorist groups wanting to split the motherland' and calling for their own Islamic state, East Turkestan (Xinhua 2014). Others have claimed that the protest started as peaceful[2]. Foreign media, for example, argue that, based on Uyghur narratives, it was the Chinese police force who attacked the demonstrators which in turn lead to violent reactions (The Economist 2009).

China has, during the past 20 years, emerged as a superpower with its influence reaching into all continents of the world (Watts 2012). Despite this interconnectedness with the outside world, until 2009, mainstream global media directed little attention towards the conflict between the Chinese state and the minority population Uyghurs. In the past 6 years, there has been a growing interest in the situation in northwestern China, where Xinjiang is situated. The region is rich in natural resources and comprises one-sixth of the territory of China, thus making it of great national interest. This wealth of natural resources has, according to many scholars, been the reason for the PRC's tight control in the region (Millward 2007, Han 2010, Holdstock 2010). Investment levels have increased dramatically during the past 20 years and so has the population, mostly due to Han migration from other provinces. By establishing the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR[3]) in 1955, the Chinese state acknowledged the territorial boundaries of the region and the identity of the group or groups exercising autonomy, in this case the Uyghur people. The Uyghurs are a Turkic-Muslim minority who speak Uyghur, a Turkic language closely related to Uzbek, currently written in Arabic script (Bovingdon 2010:xvi). In 2010 the Chinese authorities estimated 10 million Uyghurs living in XUAR, out of a population of 22 million. Out of the remaining 12 million, 8.6 million were Han Chinese and the rest minorities such as Hui and Kazak (SBX 2010)[4].

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[2] Allegedly, they protested against discrimination of Uyghurs in the south province of Guangdong. On this specific occasion it started as a demonstration calling on the Xinjiang's governor to come out and talk about the accusation against Uyghurs for rape in Guangdong, and murders of two Uyghurs (The Economist 2009).

[3] The abbreviation XUAR and the name Xinjiang will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.

[4] Finley (2006) discusses the discrepancies with official statistics of demographic distribution between Han and minorities in XUAR.

The conflict that has ravaged Xinjiang since late the 1980s has transformed into, what some consider, a possibly destabilising force for the Chinese government (Shichor 2005). The potential threat of this conflict to the PRC, as a secure and united state, has been researched by international scholars who mainly focus on exploring the causes of the conflict[5]. The conclusions from this research have been fairly similar. In opposition to the Chinese government's official explanation, research has argued for political issues of lack of political representation from Uyghurs, socio-economic disadvantages for Uyghurs in rural areas, and repression of religious and cultural practices as potential causes for the conflict. Despite the interest of international scholars and to some extent news media, foreign humanitarian intervention, from governments and non-governmental organisations, has not been overt or brought up as pressing concern (Finley 2013:20).

The Uyghur diaspora continues to clamour for an increase in international assistance. They have become politically engaged in the conflict and have sought to mobilise in order to lobby for greater global attention to be paid to the situation for the Uyghurs in Xinjiang. Strong opinions have been expressed by the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), the largest transnational Uyghur diaspora organisation, who claim that the implementation of internal Chinese economic and political campaigns have lead to a process of cultural genocide against the Uyghurs (WUC 2013). The Chinese state has responded by accusing the WUC of having hostile intentions and wanting to spread evil in China (Yan 2006). However, the perception of discrimination has maintained and is believed to have fuelled and strengthened the feeling of a threat against Uyghur identity, both in- and outside China (Han 2010, Holdstock 2010).

The Xinjiang Conflict is interesting due to its many different aspects, among them the collision between the discontent over marginalisation and inequality felt by the Uyghurs and the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) fight against terrorism. This contestation over the causes of the increased violence is at the heart of the conflict, and it is also what has placed significance of the Uyghurs and their collective identity at the centre of the battleground. The Uyghurs' identity as a culturally different, Muslim minority, different from the majority Han Chinese population has become what Hall argues "a matter of considerable political significance" (Hall 1996:29). It is in cases where an identity becomes salient, for example seen as overarching, natural and unique; that violent conflict becomes more likely (Sen 2006:xv), as it reinforces the idea of the 'self' and the 'other'. The relationship between conflict and identity has been defined as the centre of contemporary conflicts, where identity, involving strong attention to roots, beliefs and history serves as the basis for the polarisation between groups and thus is the driving force of conflicts (Kaldor 2013a,

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[5] See for example: Gladney (1990), Dillion (2004), Shichor (2007), Han (2010) and Holdstock (2010).

2013b). This contrast conflicts in the past where inter-state wars dominated in practice and literature (Kaldor 2013a:336). Today, identity is constructed in many violent conflicts as the struggle over the right to power and resources in the name of a specific group with a specific identity (Kaldor 2013b:5). These instances are particularly prevalent in "situations where sovereignty is weakened […] [as opportunities are opened up] for new attempts to establish […] collective identities" (Kaldor 2013a:344). Identity in this understanding can be seen as both the cause as well as the effect of a conflict.

What makes the Xinjiang Conflict unique is that China is widely considered a strong sovereign state. This contradicts Kaldor's argument that identity conflicts prevail through new 'friend-enemy' distinctions primarily in weakened state (*ibid.*). Further, the construction of identity is highly relevant in the case of the Xinjiang Conflict. The Uyghur identity is not only salient but also contested and it has been argued that the polarisation of Uyghur identity is both the cause (Dillion 2004) and the effect (Bovingdon 2010) of the conflict with the Chinese state. This paper argues that contestation of Uyghur identity has fuelled the conflict, and may have prolonged it to a point of intractability. This research utilises the idea of the boundary of collective identity and how different actors' presentation and articulation of identity markers may influence the construction and reconstruction of identity. This study also sets out to assess these dynamics of Uyghur identity[6] in the context of the Xinjiang Conflict, and thus contribute to future academic discussion and development of identity dynamics in asymmetrical conflict settings, which is something of great concern for the area of global studies, as it highlights the continued importance and essentiality of contemporary conflicts. It also provides a discussion of China's internal structures, which, in turn, can help to form an understanding of China's role in global issues and development.

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[6] For the purpose of this study Uyghur 'identity' will be used in singular, however it must be acknowledged that an Uyhur's identity is dynamic and pluralistic and the terminology 'identities' may be equally as valid.

AIM AND RESEACH QUESTIONS

This study aims to explore and discuss the dynamics of identity in conflict, through examining the Uyghur collective identity, how it is constructed and contested by different actors of the Xinjiang Conflict. This study seeks to draw conclusions about how identity is constructed, contested and manifested in contemporary conflicts, in the specific context of China as an emerging power.

The research question for this thesis is:
How is Uyghur identity constructed and contested in the context of the Xinjiang Conflict?

This main question will be guided by these sub-questions:
  → Within what areas is Uyghur identity contested?
  → How are identity markers and boundaries of Uyghur identity contested and negotiated?
  → How do the Chinese government, Uyghur diaspora groups and the Uyghur population present and articulate Uyghur identity?

The study examines the contestation of Uyghur identity from the perspective of different actors in the conflict, through the process of text analysis. When examining the dynamics of the Xinjiang Conflict three groups could be detected: the Chinese government, the Uyghur diaspora, and the Uyghur population in Xinjiang. The Chinese government, led by the Chinese Communist Party, is a main actor in the conflict. With a 'loud voice' the party has maintained a firm opinion on matters of the conflict. According to them it is not issues of grievances and identity, but of purposeful destruction of the Chinese state that has instigated violence in the region. It is also clear that the Uyghur diaspora had an influence on international public opinion about the Uyghurs as well as being a main actor in the conflict, and could therefore bring a global aspect of identity in conflict into the discussion. The last actor identified was the 'people', the Uyghurs who live in Xinjiang and who face the issues of the conflict on an everyday basis.

DELIMITATION

Conducting a study of a conflict by examining Uyghur identity in the context of the Xinjiang Conflict, allowed me to get a deeper understanding of the contestation of identity in a conflict setting. Whereas a field study could provide a broader understanding, it would require significant time and resources. This is also true for a comparative study. A comparative study of the Chinese state's relationship to other minority groups may provide a deeper understanding of how identity is contracted and contested in China. Central to the discussion of Uyghur-Han relations is for example the relationship between the Muslim

minority group Hui[7] and the Han Chinese, however this will not be in the centre of this study. In addition, this study will to not, apart from the background chapter, include a discussion of Uyghur identity before the 1990s and will instead focus on the past 20 years of the Xinjiang Conflict.

This paper acknowledges the existence of armed groups such as the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) and the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), which are active in the conflict between the Uyghurs and the Chinese state. The East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM) has been labelled a terrorist group by the United States and the United Nations, and are frequently mentioned in most public statements from the CCP about the violence in XUAR (Tiezzi 2013 & Hua 2014). The Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP) is an armed group that took responsibility for the terror attack at Tiananmen Square in October 2013 (Holdstock 2010:6), claiming that it was a 'jihadi attack' on Chinese authorities. Strangely, the government in Beijing accused the ETIM and "uncultured youths", for the same attack (Hua 2014.). The size and the cohesion of these two groups has been questioned, with both organisations and their leadership maintaining low profiles and are thought to be hiding in Pakistan[8] (Mehsud & Golovnina 2014). Due to the limited data on these two groups, and the nature of this study being a text analysis, while discussing their influence on the conflict, I will instead focuses on a more influential and conspicuous actor, the World Uyghur Congress (WUC); a transnational diaspora organisation.

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[7] The "The Huis have been an integral part of the political map of China and Xinjiang since the mid-nineteenth century and form an intermediary position between Han and Uyghurs" (Rudelson & Jankowiak 2004:311).
[8] The Chinese states determination to eradicate terrorism has on a national level resulted in high securitisation of the Xinjiang region and it has now stretched to international cooperation. As of April 2015, the Chinese government has entered into a $46 billion transport and infrastructure plan together with the Pakistani government. The plan also includes cooperation to battle terrorist groups such as EITM and TIP (Tharoor 2015).

METHODOLOGY

To understand how identity, and in this specific case Uyghur identity, is constructed and contested in conflict, an interpretive approach has be used to seek to explore implicit social meanings and to describe a situation rather than explaining it. This study begins with the premise of a socially constructed reality, where meanings, ideas and practices are being scrutinised. As the analysis is from such a perspective the methodology chosen also starts from the position that the researcher's knowledge of reality is a social construction. In order to create interpretive analytical space this study is a qualitative study using text analysis. The collected texts have been interpreted in order to explore and develop an understanding of the construction and contestation of the Uyghur identity in the Xinjiang Conflict. The idea of using texts to study identity dynamics is to give room for the complexities of identity politics in contemporary conflicts.

The PRC, and specifically Xinjiang has been chosen for the study, because it is an interesting case in its own right regarding Chinas increased influence on the world stage and their relationship to the Uyghur minority people, but also because it illustrates more broadly the struggle between a strong authoritarian state and a terrorist threat or minority group civil right activists over questions of autonomy and identity. Further, it is also interesting in comparison to other patterns of minority nationalism and identity formation around the world (Lecours & Nootens 2009).

During the process of initial research, the book *Eurasian Crossroads: A History of Xinjiang* by the historian James Millward (2007) together with the book *The Art of Symbolic Resistance: Uyghur Identities and Uyghur-Han relations in Contemporary Xinjiang* by anthropologist Joanne N. Smith Finley (2013), served as a basis for identifying key actors in the Xinjiang Conflict. The three perspectives of the analysis that is the Chinese government, Uyghur diaspora and the Uyghur population, were selected due to their different connections to the conflict. During this processes of reading several markers of Uyghur identity were detected, such as clothing, territory and language. These factors later came to serve as a guiding tool when the research questions were constructed and the search for other sources began.

To answer the research question; *how is Uyghur identity constructed and contested in the context of the Xinjiang Conflict?,* multiple sources were scanned to find key statements and texts that were linked to the identity of the Uyghurs. A starting point was to build a theoretical understanding of identity construction, and its relation to conflict and violence. Many of the existing theories and research on identity, as expected, provide discussions on constructivist theory, of the idea of identity as subjective or objective as well as arguments for the importance of studying hybrid or pluralistic identities in a multicultural world. A

broad range of literature was examined and finally a selection of authors[9], on the basis of constructivist identity theory, was chosen. As the theoretical discussion of identity took shape, concepts such as boundary-making, negotiation, identity markers and resistance became visible – these were used as a guiding tool when conducting the research.

The sampling of data was not based on predetermined categories but was instead selected based on initial reading of the topic and themes that prevailed during background research (this is true for all three type of sources discussed below). These themes contributed to the chosen structure of investigation into theory and empirical data later in the research. For example the discussion of clothing and appearance was noticeable in the academic sources that research Uyghur identity and Uyghur-Han relations, as well as in governmental sources and in material from the World Uyghur Congress. This meant that the themes of investigation guided the results (the areas of contestation) and the analysis.

Further, questions such as; 'what does Uyghur identity entail?', 'which state-policies concerns these markers?', 'how does the Uyghur diaspora engage in the conflict?', were explored in order to reduce the material to answer the research question. These questions were therefore of assistance when deciding what material should be used and it also allowed me to shape the three sub-research questions. The process, which followed, included identification and organisation of key material and later, analysis of texts from key actors' perspectives concerning features of Uyghur identity, categorised as areas of contestation.

DATA COLLECTION AND SOURCES

The selected data has been collected from different primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of interest include press releases, publications and news items produced by the CCP. Academic work and journalistic sources have been used to explore Uyghur cultural, traditional, and religious identity (including Rudelson 1997, Yee 2003/2005, Bovingdon 2010, Finley 2013). Other articles, media statements, publications and conference reports from the diaspora umbrella organisation the World Uyghur Congress have provided useful information to further frame the views of the Uyghur diaspora. In order to fill the gap on some of the areas research, articles from international news agencies have also been utilised, this is due to their ability to present an overall picture of the conflict. The purpose of using different types of sources is to create an overall picture and a foundation for the analysis, which allows for different perspectives (Höglund & Öberg 2011:118) of what is being said about the Uyghur identity.

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[9] For example: Barth (1969), Eriksen (1993), Nagel (1994), Hall (1996), Sen (2006) and Kaldor (2013).

The following sections will critically examine the sources, focusing on how well the material is able to reflect the perspectives of the different actors: the Chinese government, the Uyghur diaspora and the Uyghur population in Xinjiang.

GOVERNMENT SOURCES

The information from the Chinese government[10] has been retrieved from several different sources, for example the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' homepage, the CCP homepage and several state-run news agencies. A major problem that was encountered during the research process was the censorship from the Chinese government. This obstacle has been discussed in many other academic works (Finley 2006, Millward 2007, Yee 2005). The CCP closely monitors activities of local and foreign journalists, which results in limited independent sources of news from the region (BBC 2009). Censorship by authoritarian states, both as a limitation of freedom of speech in social media and of researchers, is not unique to China, but happens in countries like Iran, Belarus, Egypt and Cuba as well. The outcome of this research was not that surprising, yet the extent of the states own limited information output was interestingly ominous, and intertwined with the subject of this thesis, and does therefore require further discussion.

When searching on the Foreign Ministry's homepage using search words such as 'Xinjiang', 'Uyghur', 'Ethnic' there were less than five hits. Instead different spellings of 'Uyghur', 'Uygur', 'Uighur' were used as search words as well as 'Conflict' and 'Culture', but there was a notice translated [by the author] into "Error retrieving the key words, the key words contained illegal words" (*Jiansuo chucuo, jiansuo ci zhong hanyou feifa ciyu*).

Another problem that became visible during the research was that many of the "issues" concerning the ethnic tensions in Xinjiang are not present on the central government's pages at all and when there is information it is very formal and lacks any greater detail. As the government's national and local pages did not give enough information for an in-depth study it became necessary to turn to state-run news agencies such as China Daily, Boxun, Qaramay Daily, Global Times and the main news agency Xinhua. What was noticeable was that much of the news, presented on the English version of Xinhua, is standardised news articles, which could be found on many of the other news sites. Further, almost all news agencies, both state-run and independent once refer to the state-run news agency Xinhua, which clearly shows that the government controls most media or at least is the main source of information.

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[10] The Chinese government, the Chinese state and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) will be used interchangeably throughout the paper. This decision was taken because the PRC is a one-party state, and, thus the CCP represents the whole state and the government,

Data collected via these sources could be interpreted as a form of propaganda by the state, promoting CCP policies (Finley 2006:132), which may prove an obstacle for the research. However, it is important to move beyond the limited information to instead assess what it means that the government have chosen not to, for example, include the larger minorities as a search word on their homepage. This will be discussed in the results section. What can be said about the sources used is that they reflect a public 'official' perspective of the CCP, and it is how they present news, policies and debates that serve as a base for the analysis of this paper.

DISAPORA SROUCES

The main sources used for this part of the study comes from the World Uyghur Congress homepage where they publish press releases, news letters and interviews with their spokesmen and the organisation's president Rabiyä Qadir. Chen (2011) concludes that the WUC are central to the social networks of the Uyghur diaspora and their political mobilisation. Concerning scholarly work on the Uyghur diaspora community, much of the research has focused on the used of social media and online networks by Uyghur to uphold and strengthen Uyghur identity outside the PRC (Vergani & Zeuv 2011, Chen 2011). The second part of data on Uyghur diaspora chosen for this study has mainly been collected from a study made by Guang and Debata between 2004 and 2008, where they conducted anthropological research of the Uyghur diaspora community in the United States.

ACADEMIC SOURCES

Due to the nature of this study, that is text analysis rather than fieldwork and interviews, I chose to focus on existing anthropological research on Uyghurs and their attachment to the Chinese state, their own identity and the conflict.

Fieldwork from Xinjiang is limited, especially on "politically sensitive subjects" (Finley 2006:147). Researchers have been subject to censorship or totally denied access to inquired areas by local authorities. For instance Herbert Yee writes that Uyghur-Han relations were not "suitable for survey research" (Yee 2003:35). When conducting his pilot research in 2000 on Uyghur-Han relations it was considered a sensitive subject, but he and his team still had more access and fewer restrictions on the questionnaires than when he conducted the extended version of the research in 2001. In the extended research 40 per cent of those contacted declined interviews, the sampling was limited to approved areas, and the research team were constantly under pressure from local official advising them to not conduct research on ethnic relations and conflict (Yee 2003). Despite such difficulties some conclusions can be drawn from the survey research, as the findings could be considered less biased than the extended research made in 2001, when the local authorities limited the scope of the research area and objects.

The central source in this part of the study comes from an expert in Uyghur studies, Joanne N. Smith Finley. She has conducted anthropological research on Uyghurs in Xinjiang during 1995-1996 and in 2004, with focus on contemporary relations between Han and Uyghur. Her research was chosen specifically because it is the vastest and most recent study of Uyghur identity. Her findings are combined together with two studies made by Herbert Yee (2003, 2005) as well as findings from Justin Rudelson's fieldwork made in Xinjiang in the late 1980's. In order to get a broader view of Han and Uyghur relations the book *The Uyghurs: Strangers in Their Own Land* (2010) by Gardner Bovingdon has been used as an additional source. Bovingdon presents a systematic approach to the conflict between Uyghurs and the Chinese state, seeking to scrutinise how and why a significant proportion of the Uyghurs have for the past 60 years resisted incorporation into the Chinese state. The extensive data is collected from interviews with mostly educated urban youth to middle-aged Uyghur and Han informants together with information from Chinese printed and broadcasted media, as well as Uyghur literature and music. Similarly to Finley, Bovingdon's research was conducted in between 1994 and 2005.

The fieldwork utilised to analyse identity markers and boundaries making by the Uyghurs is, though valid and fruitful, unfortunately based on research that was conducted in 1990s and early 2000s. More recent fieldwork research on the Uyghur identity and the Xinjiang Conflict is limited or non-existent; this might depend on the increased state control in the region and that it is a sensitive subject as the conflict has escalated. As scholars acknowledge in their work (Yee 2003, Bovingdon 2010, Finley 2013) many local Uyghur people fear prosecution and the international community does not know grassroots civil rights movements. Further, this study refrains, due to the scope and time limit of the thesis, to discuss the broader areas of prejudgment and mistrust, both among Uyghurs and Han Chinese and its influence on the conflict and construction of the Uyghur identity.

ANALYSIS
The theory presented in the study is not used as a model to explain reality, but rather to serve as a guiding tool for asking questions about the selected texts and analysis of these empirical observations. As the process of analysis moved forward in this research, ideas of identity evolved which changed the initial theoretical discussion, so called theory development (Yin 2003, 28-29). This paper presents several central theoretical concepts of identity and identity construction, these, among others, are boundary-making, negotiation and identity markers. The concepts are discussed in relation to conflict and actors within conflict in order to create a foundation for the result of the study.

When analysing identification processes, in this case contestation and construction of Uyghur identity, I have looked at how the different agents in the conflict express themselves and act in relation to identity issues (for example what identity markers they emphasised and how they positioned themselves in relation to the 'other' as well as to collective identity). The statements were then organised by areas of contestation as defined in the theory section, which have been analysed through the perspective of the key actors (CCP, Uyghur diaspora, Uyghurs in Xinjiang). When collecting and later analysing the data, key markers of identification processes became visible. These are territory, autonomy, religion, clothing, traditions and language. Intragroup dynamics is also included in the analysis as the findings of the research showed that it was not only areas of contestation that produced boundary-making between the actors of the conflict, but at the construction and contestation of identity also happened from within a group.

REFLECTIONS

In conflict research, available primary information from the conflict area depends on the press freedom and openness in the country. As mentioned previously, due to the existing censorship by the CCP, it is very difficult to "establish what is going on between the Uyghur in Xinjiang and the Chinese government" (Höglund & Öberg 2011:55). This specifically affects this study, as local Uyghur sources are almost non-existent (Millward 2007). Reporters Without Borders writes that 85 per cent of the Uyghur-based sources (in Uyghur, Mandarin and English) are inaccessible "both to Internet users based in Xinjiang and those abroad" (Reporters Without Borders 2009). This creates the problem of not being able to ascertain details of the conflict. Yet, it is through researchers that have been given access to the Xinjiang region, and Uyghur diaspora communities with local contacts that this study has been able to, to some extent, examine Uyghurs' contestation and construction of their identity.

A potential bias in the selection of data is that it is limited to predominately English sources. However, since I understand some Mandarin, and this was complimented with the help of a dictionary and the Pleco application, I was able to use to also use Chinese news agencies and the CCPs Chinese homepages, which opened up for more interesting material. Nevertheless, the translation of the material from English to Mandarin used in this study has been doubled checked with two Chinese friends[11] via email correspondence and WeChat.

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[11] They are He Wei and Yinrun Li. They are both Han Chinese, students at a University in Chengdu and they are not members of the CCP. The communication took place between the 20-26 of March 2015.

This author acknowledges that by choosing to interpret actions of a state, and its people, there is a risk of limiting the idea of identity to nationalism. However, as will be discussed in the study, the discourse of a nation-state is an important part of the identity both for the Han Chinese but also for the Uyghurs. Hence, while the disputed idea of Xinjiang and 'Uyghur-land' is taken into consideration in the analysis, a more nuanced understanding of identity is also used. Another general consideration that needs to be taken into account is that academic work that is scrutinised in this study, tells the narrative of Uyghurs in Xinjiang, and it is therefore important to have that in mind when presenting the data. The opinions expressed in the selected texts are from a small group of Uyghurs, and does not reveal knowledge about what a large proportion of the Uyghurs identify with these perceptions. However, the study does include perceptions of collective identity both from people of different areas, gender and class.

BACKGROUND

THE XINJIANG CONFLICT AND UYGHUR HISTORY

This section will not provide an in-depth account for the reasons why the Xinjiang Conflict has occurred, or possible peace attempts to the conflict.[12] It will instead present a background of the conflict with focus on the key actors' role in historical patterns. This section also investigates Uyghur history in order to provide an understanding of who the Uyghurs are. This section is divided into three parts, *A New Autonomous Region, Political and Cultural Polarisation,* and *Ethnic Unrest and Migration*.

A NEW AUTONOMOUS REGION

The Xinjiang province[13] borders Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. It is China's largest region, measuring double the size of Turkey. The translation of Xinjiang is *new border*, and it received its official name Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region (XUAR) in 1955, six years after the Peoples Liberation Army, under the leadership of the CCP, defeated the Guomindang and came into power. Since the 18th century the region had been an unstable part of the Manchu Qing Empire, which in 1912 was inherited by the People's Republic of China (PRC) that succeeded the Qing dynasty (Millward 2007). The central government promised prosperity, self-rule and cultural and religious freedom to the region, assuring the Uyghurs that they would enjoy employment and access to the natural resources of the region. At this time the region's population was fairly homogenous consisting of approximately 86 per cent Uyghurs, less than five per cent Han Chinese and the remaining population consisting of Uzbeks, Kazaks and Huis (Millward 2007:245). Today the demographic comprises around 46 per cent Uyghur and 40 per cent Han Chinese (SBX 2010). The majority of the Uyghurs live in the southern region, the Tarim Basin and the Han Chinese in the northern more developed region, Dzungharia.

Scholars present multiple accounts and histories concerning where the Uyghurs are from and if they have always been a 'united' group. Some argue that the Chinese government formalised the Uyghur identity through a classification system in the 1930s. This system grouped the Turkic speaking oasis[14] dwellers, who subscribed to a broader *musulman* identity, together, giving them minority nationality status, with particular political rights, and thus separating them from other groups such as Kazaks, Uzbeks and Han Chinese (Rudelson 1997:7 & Gladney 1990:4).

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[12] For example Forbes (1986), Han (2010) and Holdstock (2014).
[13] See map of Xinjiang in appendix 1.
[14] An oasis refers to a village characterised by being an isolated area of vegetation in a desert, with a water resources from for example a spring.

POLITICAL AND CULTURAL POLARISATION

The history of the East Turkestan Republic (ETR) aids an understanding of the strands of independence and nationalism that seem to run through Xinjiang today and which have given rise to violent situations. In the declarations of the two years of independence in 1933-4, ETR representatives stated that the republic would create a moderate Islamic and liberal democratic state. The second attempt of succession, from the Qing Empire, in 1940's was instead highlighted by Soviet interests and was of a secular nature (Millward 2007:281-2). However, according to Chinese historians, these political entities were local governing bodies under the control of the central government and full independence was never realised (Yang Faren in Nabijan 2008:97). This meant that the Uyghurs were and are solely Chinese citizens. Many Uyghurs however strongly desire the creation of an independent 'Uyghur state', or East Turkestan.

There are different understandings of what 'Uyghur' entails, which might be one of the roots of the Xinjiang Conflict, or at least seen as a tension between Uyghurs and the Chinese government. Nevertheless, there are more obvious issues in modern Chinese history that have influenced the Uyghur population. For instance, the Cultural Revolution (1966-1971), as it did for the majority of the Chinese population, brought many long hard years for the Uyghur people. Chauvinistic attacks on Uyghurs, and other non-Han citizens, for being traitors and accusing their culture of being "backward, feudal [and] bourgeois" (Millward 2007:271) were actively encouraged by the central government. Traditional costumes, which still exist today, trading goods in bazaars, Uyghur music, instruments and dance, native dressing, central elements of marriages, circumcision parties, and other traditional rituals were all forbidden during the years of the revolution (Millward 2007:274).

During the revolution, although limited, there are accounts of the East Turkestan People's Revolutionary Party (ETPRP) being active, trying to organise Turkic people in the Xinjiang region to fight for independence. During two years from 1968 they sought to again create an independent ETR that was communist, secular, and pro-Soviet (Dillion 2004). This confirms that the driving forces behind the ETR stretched beyond fundamentalist Islam. As Millward concludes, there is therefore not a clear connection to the Uyghur movement in the late 1980's, which called for an Islamic republic. Yet, inspiration might have come from the global Islamic movement during the 1980s, which was associated with progress and liberation of Muslim people. Turmoil in Xinjiang during this time, with heavy in-migration of Han Chinese to the region, as well as birth control policies, provided the context in which a greater desire for the promised autonomy was fought (Millward 2007:282). There were also remaining grievances from the Cultural Revolution that might have increased the Uyghurs concern for the survival of their culture, of which Islam is a big part. These are all allegations of which respective Chinese governments have frequently explained away as non-substantial or even wrongful misconceptions (Xinhua 2003).

MIGRATION AND ETHNIC UNREST

The Uyghurs have emigrated in waves since the establishment of XUAR. They started to migrate to developed countries in Europe and the United States in the early 1990s. Before then many had settled in India, Soviet Union and Turkey in three waves of migration. The first wave occurred after the CCP took over the leadership in 1949, the second was during the hardship related to the Great Leap Forward in the early 1960s, and the third during the time of the Open Door Policy introduced by Deng Xiaoping after the death of Mao Zedong in the late 1970s (Guang & Debata 2010:65). During this time many Uyghurs chose to leave China due to lack of work opportunities for Uyghurs. Many of the Uyghurs who emigrated in the 1990's settled in the United States, are seen as political refugees fearing prosecution for their activism (*ibid.* 69).

Currently, there are approximately 11.5 million Uyghurs in the world, and among these almost 500 000 live outside the PRC (Joshua Project 2010). The largest Uyghur diaspora organisation is the World Uyghur Congress (WUC), established in 2004 when the East Turkestan National Congress and the World Uyghur Youth Congress merged. The president, Rabiyä Qadir[15] who also founded the Uyghur Human Rights and Democracy Foundation is currently living in exile. The WUC is an umbrella organisation that claims to represent the "collective interest of the Uyghur people both in East Turkestan and abroad" by "promoting the right of the Uyghur people to use peaceful, nonviolent, and democratic means to determine the political future of East Turkestan" (WUC 2015a).

The Uyghurs that stayed in China continued to protest against marginalisation of Uyghurs. After disturbances in Ghulja (Yining) in 1997 when several hundred people, enraged by increasingly acute restrictions on religion and the execution of ten or twenty alleged separatists and high number of Uyghur arrests, came out in protest on the streets, the situation in the region radically changed. Nearly 400 people died and hundreds were wounded in clashes with the police and the military (Dillion 2004:93-6). The result was heavy restrictions on freedom of speech through a 'Three-No" policy, which included '*No questions about the turmoil, No telling outsiders the true story and No visiting relatives that had been imprisoned after the events'*. In an official explanation published by Xinjiang authorities in 1999, the events were allegedly planned years in advance by forces that wanted to split the motherland (*ibid.* 96-7). From the terror attacks of 11th September 2001, most expression of discontent with the government in Xinjiang has been labelled as 'separatism' or 'terrorism' – in keeping with a grown global fear of terror.

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[15] Rabiyä Qadir, a Xinjiang born Uyghur, multimillionaire business women and activist was in 2000 sentenced to seven years in Chinese prison accused of "revealing state secrets by sending clippings from local Xinjiang newspapers to her husband in the United States". She was released three years early and fled to the United States to reunite with her husband and children (Millward 2007:360).

During the 21st century, the Uyghurs have staged thousands of protests expressing their grievances concerning what they perceive as discriminatory actions by the government. These practices include land grabs, housing demolitions, environmental destruction, unfavourable language policies, restrictions on religion, discrimination in the job market and the flow of immigration of Han Chinese to the region (HIIK 2013:103 and Kuo 2014). The increased polarisation culminated in intense clashes in Urumqi in 2009, between Han Chinese, Uyghurs and the police. The clashes resulted in almost 200 deaths and around 1700 injured. It was the most deadly episode of turmoil in Xinjiang's history (HIIK 2013:104). Subsequently, the CCP further increased security measures with special police forces in the region and for the coming four years there were less reports on disturbances in the region.

Today, western and Uyghur human rights groups are actively lobbying for civil rights of the Uyghur people. Yet, little official information concerning actions within Xinjiang and the Chinese borders concerning civil rights movements, separatist movements and implementation of minority policies, is avaliable. The Chinese government frequently reports on illegal actions by terrorist and separatist groups in the Xinjiang region, but fails to address the relationship between the state and the Uyghur, and instead rejects it as evil forces that must be dealt with, with an iron fist (Zhang et all 2014). The violence has, since 2013, also spread outside Xinjiang for example by an alleged suicide attacks by Uyghurs in Beijing, Kunming and Guangzhou.

A THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

This chapter will explore the theoretical background for this thesis and how the theorists' discussions connect with each other and how that discussion relates to this study. To serve the purposes of this paper, this section discusses constructivist identity theory at a general level before explaining the related field of identity construction in a conflict setting and how different actors (government, diaspora and local population) of a conflict can shape, construct and negotiate identity.

WHAT IS IDENTITY?

Constructivist theory begins from a premise that identity (either individual or group) is a result of the environment; meaning that one's surroundings shape the idea of the 'self'. This could be one's immediate family, community or society as a whole. Barth argued that identity is the outcome of perceived differences between groups of people and that such divides are created through social interaction (Barth, 1969:10). Further, people construct and apply meanings to these differences primarily to order individuals and groups into communities. Identities can therefore be defined in relation to that which they are not (Eriksen, 1993:35). Additionally, a person's sense of affinity and unity with the identified group is sustained as long as the group has distinct features by which it is recognised (Kaldor 2013a:338).

This process of self-ascription is based mainly on indicators such as language, beliefs, traditions, gender, class, territory and history and it can be personal, social, cultural and collective at the same time (Barth, 1969:10). Particularly in ones formative years, one consciously and unconsciously begins to choose markers that serve as the foundation for one's personal identity and group belonging, and the features are regarded as significant to the individual (Barth in Finley 2013:7). The in-group cultural characteristics change continuously over time and space, as they are dependent on the context of specific historical and institutional sites. Barth therefore concluded that identity is transformative, not primordial and fixed, but something that can be deconstructed and reconstructed (Barth, 1969:12). Such dynamics are on-going and the meaning of any particular identity is thus open to contestation.

ETHNIC IDENTITY

A dominant axis within identity theory (assumed as a social construction) is the concept of ethnicity and ethnic identity. These identities are seen as collective and may extend across state borders. Smith defines an ethnic group as a named human population, which shares ancestry myths, histories and cultures and has an association with a specific territory which together hold a uniform sense of solidarity (Smith, 1986:16). Extensive research has, since Smith's definition in the mid-1980s, explained the dichotomous nature of ethnicity, as

something both achieved and ascribed (Eriksen, 1993:55-6) In addition to this dichotomy, ethnic identity is "an aspect of relationship, not a cultural property of a group" (*ibid.* 34), meaning that it is the cultural differences that are communicated between groups in societies.

More recent studies (Eriksen 2001, Brubaker & Cooper 2004 and Pieterse 2007) have considered the limitations of the current ethnicity and ethnic identity discourse. On the one hand, current discourse concerns itself with the scope of ethnicity and what it entails. On the other, the empirical evidence of identity is presented as fluid, and individuals often obtain and maintain hybrid identities. This means that, while categorising certain groups as belonging to a certain 'ethnicity', in order to "organise and justify collective action along certain lines" (Brubaker & Cooper 2004:5), one risks ignoring features as hybridity. It does not serve the purpose of this paper to label the Uyghur people as only an ethnic identity but reflection instead upon the areas of identity, which are salient in the conflict, is suitable and required. Further, this means that it is beneficial to not only consider the ethnic identity of warring actors, but rather to explore how these different agents understand and utilise different identity markers, and more specifically how boundaries are maintained and negotiated in the conflicts.

IDENTITY IN CONFLICT

The 'margin', or the boundary between identities of which identity markers' uphold (Hall 1996:18), is what constructs identities and it is the enactment of these boundary mechanisms that is the focus of this study. These identity markers, such as religion, language, clothing, traditions and values define a group and how they can be understood in the symbolic and social sense of the term. Tajfel (1979) posited relational identities as something latent in human beings and argued for the significance of understanding why, when and how a particular identity is salient or not salient. Here, more recent researchers have, for example, claimed that ethnic identity is salient in new contemporary conflict[16] as it can be seen as a symbolic tool in political struggles, especially over rights and resources (Nagel 1994, Eriksen 2001, Kaldor 2013a). The identity markers in these instances function as parts in a 'tool-kit', made up of symbols chosen from the cultural characteristics available to them (Barth in Finley 2013:7). This forms part of the collective identity which individuals have recognised themselves with.

In some cases, when social and personal identities become more salient, states face challenges of coping with the political exploitation of these identities, not only by governments themselves but also by other groups. For example, a religious identity can be

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[16] A conflict is seen as a process that evolves over time that has multiple levels and factors, which constantly change and alternate, and defined as incapability of goal between groups (Kriesberg 2003).

considered to be significant for different people, adding value to an individual or a group (Barth 1969:14 and Eriksen 1993:46). This is not because "the self is infinitely multifaceted" but because experiences and relationships that make up the 'self' and the 'other' can be expanded symbolically in conflicting ways (Eriksen 2001:65). In turn, such symbolic contestations create friction between other groups in society who view their own people, and their religious identity, as the right one, and indirectly the other identity is flawed or even threatening. At this stage, parties in a conflict "make a difference" in interaction, and their cultural differences (Eriksen 1993:38) make a more salient, and maybe stronger, boundary between the groups.

Finley orders the process of identity construction and boundary-making into three parts: social, spatial and symbolic. The first, the social boundary, includes an increased reluctance of groups wanting to spend time together. The second, the spatial boundary, includes separate residence and different consumption patterns. The third boundary includes symbolic meanings in patterns of interaction between groups, for example endogamy and language differences (Finley 2013:134-35). This articulation of 'self' and 'other' (or 'Us' and 'Them') is in many ways a conscious choice to separate ones own identity from another.

By developing Barth's and Finley's argument of the subjectivity of identity, Eriksen adds that identity formation is not always a process of mutually exclusive self-ascription but that the 'other' also contributes to the identity formation process (Eriksen 2001). In societies when identities 'clash', polarisation between different groups increases and different 'others' may influence the identity of the warring groups. Such 'others' might be the government, local leaders, civil rights groups or even diaspora. How these actors think about who they are and, who and what the antagonists are, "profoundly influences the course of any conflict between them" (Kriesberg 2003). Contemporary conflicts are, in this way, sustained by a sense of threat to collective identity that may result in a protective response. This response may manifest itself differently among different groups; in many cases this results in the construction of distance between the 'self' and the threat (Finley 2013:149). This self-understanding can also lead to an ignorance of the "relevance of all other affiliation and association and [redefines] the demands of the 'sole' identity in a particularly belligerent form" (Sen 2006:176), which violence in turn emanates from.

This rationale behind outbreaks of violence and conflict can, according to Sen, be a matter of conceptual confusion. In a world of multidimensional identities, the illusion of a single identity, for example being solely Hutu during the genocide in Rwanda in the 1990's and the instrumental use of that identification, is what spurs violence (*ibid.* 174-5). This defence mechanism prompts a tendency for hostile acts, rejections and criticism of the other party, prolonging the conflict beyond an "easy resolution". Such a process, when boundary-making cultivates violence, is often described as an intractable conflict, when intra- and intergroup

"cooperation" instead pushes the conflict "beyond an escalatory stage to a stage in which the conflict itself becomes defined as self" (Northrup 1989:75). The process towards intractability of a conflict is thus "skilfully cultivated and fomented" by actors who use the basic instinct of self-preservation to justify violent defence of themselves and those they consider share their identity (Sen 2006:175). The idea that different actors in conflicts have the ability to influence the conflict and reconstruct identities will be discussed in the next section as three perspectives on the contestation and construction of identity are presented.

ACTORS AND IDENTITY

GOVERNMENTS AND IDENTITY CONTESTATION

In conflict settings, identity markers may come to be objects of contestation in the political sphere. In many conflicts, it is the voice of the government that is the loudest. The government has the power to influence the views of the country and even larger regions. Eriksen argues that powerful actors sometimes force a group to fill a certain space and, in doing so, obtain a certain identity, an identity which they might not be comfortable or associate with (Eriksen 1993:85). An example of this is a national register of the population conducted by states. People are then placed within given categories of "nationality", "race", "ethnicity", and "gender" in order for the state to compile useful statistical data for administrative needs. Historically, there have been several examples of governments' instrumental initiative of ethnic and racial classification systems established by centralised colonial state administrations, where they not only want to distinguish groups from each other, and from the majority, for statistical purposes, but also do so to maintain power and to exercise control (Anderson 2006:166-8).

Today, identities of nationhood created by states remain salient and do not necessarily reflect local self-understanding (*ibid.* 165). This give rise to problems as some groups are not considered acceptable and are therefore not acknowledged by the state as a citizens that are entitled to certain legal rights, such as voting in the national elections. The Myanmar government has enforced this on the Muslim minority group Rohingya, who they deny full citizenship. However, if Rohingyas accept themselves as part of the category Bengali (immigrants from Bangladesh) they may sustain immigrant status and certain legal rights (Perlez 2014). This type of enforced categorisation, including no fractions, can take different more defuse shapes. In the face of "battle against terrorism", the single understanding of the Muslim community as being affiliated with politicised Islam and extremism reveals an approach that categorise people based on what their "alleged religious leaders declare as spokesmen for their 'flock'" (Sen 2006:76). The outcome is patronisation of human identity according to Sen (*ibid.* 178). By ignoring the plurality or hybridity of any identity, by excluding or forcing assimilation a state actively construct the identities of their citizens.

A way of assimilation, that may be a root to polarisation and later violent conflict, is the use of power by the government to regulate the exercise of cultural or religious traditions. In an attempt to weaken or limit group identities, governments may even conduct "wholesale campaigns of assimilation" (Dickson 2010:4). An example is the state campaign in Turkey that aimed to construct a new, secular Turkish national identity, by banning headscarves and other Muslim identity markers (McGoldrick 2006 in Dickson 2010:5). This policy exercises exclusion and negotiation of an ethnic or religious social identity, by the government, and may influence the identity of that group. By telling a group of people that their way of life, the traditions they hold, are not legal may cause the group to negotiate the boundaries of their identity by 1) self-censorship of markers which represent their identity or by 2) expressing grievances over such policy, through both peaceful and violent actions.

A government may also use policies to internally prevent or reduce conflict. For instance, by implementing economic and social polices, that aim to integrate an excluded group or to reduce grievances felt by a particular group or community, peaceful relationships can be formed (Kaldor 2013a:337). According to Nagel, land resources and civil rights are what often constitute the bases of these grievances and the control of territory often gives rise to conflict (Nagel 1994:159). The establishment of an autonomous region means that resources are allotted to help protect "the distinct identity of the titular group. In doing so, the government both strengthens group solidarity and sanctions a territorial frame for that group's political aspirations" (Bovingdon 2010:30). However, these policies that aim to incorporate certain groups may be experiences by the 'other' as discriminatory and unfair practices, that results in creation of new boundaries or the strengthening of existing ones (Nagel 1994:157). Within a state, identities are constantly negotiated between state and the population, as well as among the local population itself. The population that emigrates also influences the negotiation and construction of an identity. In the next section the idea if long-distance identities are explored.

DIASPORA AND LONG-DISTANCE IDENTITIES
This study explores the idea of diaspora identities and how they influence and utilise the identity of the homeland in conflicts. Today's society exists in an era of globalisation, and the use of fast communication and heightened mobility, can allow first, second and even third generations of migrants to sustain a strong connection to the homeland. Similar to ethnic identity, the diasporic identity is relational and on-going, and hence is perpetually constructed and reconstructed in a process of boundary-making both in the host-land and in the homeland (Eriksen 1993, Hall 1996, Pieterse 2007). In many cases, "Home" is a source of pride and a romanticised place to which one wishes to return to, this can also mean that a political struggle for the rights of that "Home" may become a central part of the

identity (Orjuela 2011). This politicised diaspora, both peaceful and armed, will be discussed in this paper. However, it is important to remember that diaspora communities do not act as one solid unit, and that identities and identification with the homeland varies among the group members.

It has been recognised that diaspora, by the fact that they are removed from the violent conflict, often develop more hard-line positions in conflicts in their homeland, through maintaining and fuelling "long-distance nationalism" (Anderson, 1992:12). For example they may engage in propaganda work that might fuel the conflict. Extensive research has provided evidence that it is the continued identification with the homeland and "the people" that motivates diaspora mobilisation and commitment to struggles over the homeland (Anderson 1992, Lindholm Schulz 2003, Orjuela 2004, Baser & Swain 2009). The diaspora may consider the policies of the government or the conflict in itself as a threat to the security and survival of the homeland and its people, their people. The interesting idea here is that the articulation of homeland identity in the diaspora thus takes place in spaces that "bypass official state discourses and hegemonic constructions of identity" (Adamson 2002:160 in Orjuela 2011). And in much the same way as the population in the homeland, the diaspora contest different identity areas in order to influence, or even stoke the tensions in the conflict.

THE LOCAL POPULATION

This study will not only examine diaspora identities and state hegemony but also the identity of the local population 'on the ground', which interacts with the state and engages in conflict on a day-to-day basis. A significant characteristic of identity, especially in conflict, is the degree to which people hold their collective identity integrated with the sense that they have generally been victims of repression and domination by others. This can occur on the basis of current events or from past experiences of others that belong to the same (perceived) identity. Such conceptions tend to make people feel threatened and distrustful (Kreisberg 2003), which in turn may result in actions that aim to prevent 'attacks' and secure the survival of their identity. As the collective identity hardens, various group members may then engage in representational politics in order to unite against external pressure and internal conflict. Boundaries between groups may in these instances turn into significant markers and form symbolic resistance to the 'other', that becomes the centre for the tensions in a conflict (Vasquez & Wetzel 2009 in Finley 2013:12).

Harrell (1995) applies the idea of achieved identities, and presents an idea that treats the utilisation of identities, particularly ethnic identity. Following Eriksen's argument of 'othering', Harrell subscribes to the belief that the consciousness of ethnic minorities might already exist, but that "it will be sharpened, focused, perhaps intensified" (Harrell 1995:27)

when interfacing with the other groups. This, what can be described as confrontation, can include attempts from a group to rule another and the territory they inhabit. Such a process may also contain attempt to 'civilise' the local population by defining and educating them with the aim to enforce a particular understanding of themselves and their identity in relation to the ruler (Harrell 1995:27-9).

This process can be seen as a 'power game' that becomes evident when new contemporary conflict manifests itself in different ways. Policies of specific rights for minority groups together with labelling of such groups is an example of where the state enforces a hegemonic discourse that steers and shapes the perception of certain groups. As mentioned, there is interesting material on the salience of ethnicity as an outcome of these 'power games' (Barth 1969, Tajfel 1979), and as product of the marking of differences and modes of exclusion by majority groups (Hall 1996:17). Nevertheless, some researchers argue that it is also the attribution of capacities and needs of groups that have become the basis of current policies and that those are characteristic of "modern social transformation" (Anthias 1999:162). In this way, "social divisions permeate the society" (*ibid.*) and become something constantly present not only in conflict, but in daily social structures as well.

CONCLUDING REMARK
The scope of identity-related conflicts, and the dynamics of contestation in these conflicts, is far ranging. While it may entail the specification of a collective's norms and values, it may also involve the condition, which makes up the boundaries between groups. These boundaries tell us; who belongs and counts as a group member, as well as the nature of the group's interests. All of the factors discussed in this section concern different perspectives of a conflict, be it the Chinese government, the local population in Xinjiang or the Uyghur diaspora, and the way in which they contest areas of identity. The central idea, negotiation and boundary-making of identity both passive and active, both conscious and unconscious, will affect the continued understanding and the construction and moulding of a perceived groups identity. This can therefore assist in answering the question of how Uyghur identity is contested and constructed.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The significance of identity in the Xinjiang Conflict has led it to be labelled an "ethnic conflict" by international media and scholars. However, this label can be misleading if it creates the impression that ethnic differences themselves have caused animosity, which, in turn have resulted in violence. Instead, the Xinjiang Conflict can be more usefully understood as partly a failure of the centralised, Han-dominated state to respond effectively to minority aspirations and to successfully integrate the Uyghur people. This understanding is important as it can help to broaden the explanation for the, on the one hand, high number of protests and imprisonment of dissident activists in XUAR, and, on the other, the violent attacks and clashes during the past 20 years. These have often been sporadic and executed by single individuals or by small groups of people. Local Imams as well as the WUC have condemned all violence committed by Uyghurs.

PERSPECTIVES

It is important to stress that the most powerful actor, for example the government, does not solely decide the construction of identity. This study seeks to discuss the identity contestation and construction from a Uyghur perspective as well – both when it comes to the local population of Xinjiang and also to the Uyghur diaspora community. In order to understand and scrutinise the construction of Uyghur identity it is essential to understand different perspectives and relations between different actors of the conflict.

THE CHINESE GOVERNMENT

A central actor in the Xinjiang Conflict is the Chinese government. It is evident that the Chinese state has played an influential role in the construction of perceived Uyghur identity of both sides. According to the government's official history of China, the Xinjiang region became the Western Region Frontier Command in 60 C.E under the western Han central government, which officially belonged to the Western Han Dynasty territory, and has since been "an inseparable part of the unitary multi-ethnic Chinese" (Xinhua 2003). The Chinese government's viewpoint has gained the upper hand in contemporary China, and there are even threats of legal repercussions against "politically incorrect interpretations of history" (Nabijan 2008:99). Since Deng Xiaoping was president, the CCP has continuously claimed that they have done nothing but bring prosperity and development to the region through economic and social reforms, and that the violence that has ravaged the region is due to insurgence of hostile sources from outside the Chinese borders (Xinhua 2003).

The government have, for example, officially implemented preferential policies for minorities within education and family planning. All minority people are allowed to have more children than the Han Chinese and Uyghur teenagers who take the entry exam to university are given more credits than their Han counterparts. However, some assert that

these actions have contributed to rigid interethnic group tension (Nagel 1994:157) between the majority Han Chinese and minority Uyghur, with many Hans viewing the policies as unequal and unjust (Han 2010:246-247).

UYGHUR DIASPORA

The diaspora organisation the World Uyghur Congress (WUC) seeks to preserve a collective Uyghur identity through the promotion of culture and language, as well as nationhood. Rabiyä Qadir, who has become the symbol for Uyghur activism, being called "the mother of Uyghurs" has individually met great resistance from the CCP in her struggle for Uyghur rights. She has been accused of having been involved in planning the riots in Urumqi in 2009 and of colluding with separatists and extremists in order to destroy the peace and stability of Chinese society (Yan 2006). There is however, little evidence for Qadir's and the WUC's influence on the Uyghur population in Xinjiang.

LOCAL UYGHUR POPULATION IN XINJIANG

Western historians believe that the Uyghur people converted from Buddhism to Islam between the 14th and the 16th century (Rudelson 1997:6 and Millward 2007:85), and have since then practiced the Islamic faith. The majority of the Uyghurs are today Sunni Muslims (Rudelson 1997:81). In contrast to the CCP's history of Xinjiang, the prominent Uyghur researcher, Turgan Alams (whose work has been forbidden in the PRC, due to its sensitive political nature) claims that Uyghur people have inhabited Central Asia for over 6400 years. His research points towards the discovery of Tarmin (Turkic tribe, the ancestors of Uyghurs) mummies dating from this period in Xinjiang (Almas in Tursun, 2008:93). Many Uyghurs adhere to this idea of the Xinjiang region, or East Turkestan, as their historic homeland, which they are entitled to inhabit, or even to rule. In the Xinjiang region, Islam and Uyghur traditions are viewed as a central part of contemporary Uyghur identity. However, it is foremost the discontent over discriminatory policies which is the expressed main cause for concern for the Uyghur people.

AREAS OF CONTESTATION

While much research on the subject of identity construction and conflict has focused on identity markers, this study shows that it is not only clear symbols that become salient in a conflict setting (and in everyday life). Instead, it also includes different dynamics of identity and group belonging that come under scrutiny by actors in the conflict. Areas that are contested by the selected actors in the Xinjiang Conflict have been identified as: *Territory*, *National Unity and Autonomy*, *Culture and Religion*, *Language* and *Intragroup Dynamics.*

TERRITORY

Rabiyä Qadir, and the Uyghur diaspora community with her, constantly stresses that the territory of Xinjiang is not Chinese; that the Chinese are invaders of the Uyghur land, what is called East Turkestan. Qadir describes her childhood in Xinjiang by saying that "when I grew up I did not see any Chinese. My parents used to tell me tales of the Chinese foreigners. They only came when they were adults, where were they when they were children?" (Forced Migration 2007). While the number of Uyghurs seeking pure political independence increased during the 1990's (Finley 2000:197), most have never participated in any direct violent action to achieve this end. In contrast, many Uyghurs believe that they should concentrate on the pursuit of full equality for Uyghurs within the Chinese political system. This stance has arguably been the dominant subject of debate within Uyghur society (Finley 2013:21-3) and will be discussed further in this section.

The Chinese state and official Chinese scholars portray Xinjiang as an integral part of China and have actively disregarded any claim for independence of East Turkestan. For instance, in a text published by the state's Information Office, religious extremists are said to have "politicized the unstandardized geographical term 'East Turkistan', and fabricated an 'ideological and theoretical system' on the so-called 'independence of East Turkistan' on the basis of the allegation cooked up by the old colonialists[17]" (Xinhua 2003). The government has taken a firm stand against such a fabrication, announcing that any strife for a separate nation is a "vain wish" (*ibid.*). Further, the CCP repeatedly emphasise the protection of citizens and the importance of rule of law in their press releases and during press conferences in response to questions about instability in Xinjiang (Hua 2014).

The government has described the Uyghur diaspora as a small group of separatists that fled abroad, looking for opportunities to carry out sabotage activities with the support of "international anti-China forces" (Xinhua 2003). They are said to have plotted and organised a number of bloody incidents of terror and violence in the mid-1990s that seriously jeopardised the "lives, property and security of the Chinese people of various ethnic groups" (*ibid.*). The CCP goes further and explain that religious extremists and separatists abroad (referring to the diaspora) have during the 21st century raised the banner of:

> *[…] 'human rights,' 'freedom of religion' and 'interests of ethnic minorities,' and fabricated claims that 'the Chinese government is using every opportunity to oppress ethnic minorities,' to mislead the public and deceive world opinion in order to escape blows dealt by the international struggle against terrorism (Xinhua 2003).*

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[17] The term "old colonialists" refers to a small number of Turkic separatists and religious extremists, who in the view of the Chinese government have historically colonised the Xinjiang region, which is Chinese.

This statement demeans the struggle of Uyghur rights, and contests what can be viewed as an integral part of the contemporary Uyghur identity. Following Nagel's theoretical understanding of identity being the culmination of boundary maintenance, the contestation of what it means to be a Uyghur leads to a process of negotiation and reinforcement of the boundary between the Uyghurs and the Chinese government (Nagel 1994:161). This is because, the government, by presenting themselves as an "enemy", an actor who indirectly associate Uyghurs with terrorism, may create an 'other' to which the Uyghurs can define their 'self' by. Such an "enemy" distinction, has lead some Uyghurs to resist party initiatives, and to unite against the CCP (Bovingdon 2010:15). In addition, as identities are fluid, the fact that the government treats Uyghurs like an "enemy" may also produce a self fulfilling prophecy, potentially causing them to behave as such.

In some ways, "East Turkestan" has become a rallying point for Uyghur nationalism and activism among the diaspora (Rudelson & Jankowiak 2004:303). On the WUC's website, Xinjiang is not mentioned as a territory within the Chinese borders but instead referred to as East Turkestan or the Eastern Turkestan Republic. In a report by the Uyghur Human Rights Project (UHRP), the connection to the homeland, for the diaspora, is described as the fundamental part of their identity. The city of Kashgar and the Silk Road is "the spiritual heart of the Uyghur culture" (UHRP 2012). As mentioned, many Uyghur in Xinjiang adhere to this stance, viewing the region as their homeland to which "they have been indigenous for thousands of years" (Klimeš 2012:211).

The quote below is from one of the key leadership persons of the Uyghur American Association (UAA) and the spokesman for the WUC, Alim Seytoff. It summarises the central struggle and frustration among the more hard-lined Uyghur diaspora[18]:

> *We realise that there is no hope for the Uyghur people if we do not fight for our own right to be independent from China. We have the right to have our own nation-state. The Chinese are Chinese, and the Uyghurs are Uyghurs, they are two different [...] nations, why should they be bonded together? The Chinese authorities should realise that a friendly separate Uyghur nation-state will be beneficial to China in [the] long run.* (Guang & Debata 2010:72)

The Uyghur diaspora have, through different organisations and associations around the world managed to place the issue of East Turkestan independence on the international agenda using "advanced communications media, petitions, demonstrations and personal activism" (Shichor 2007:118). Yet, the attempts to establish their own republic have been

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[18] It is necessary to underline, as mentioned, that the diasporic community differs in stance and attitude towards the homeland.

limited by great resistance by the Chinese government and many Uyghur diaspora have instead sought a compromise: democracy, self-determination, and increased autonomy (Bovingdon 2010:Chapter 5). The CCP have, in addition to imposing heightened security measures in Xinjiang, sought to prosecute individuals, for example Qadir, rather than groups, who they perceive as stoking the tension and fuelling the conflict[19].

Related to the contestation of the territory a noteworthy difference between the Han and the Uyghurs can be seen in communication and the difference in telling time. Most Uyghurs use "Xinjiang time", that is the local time according to the global time set up. What is known as "Beijing time" used by most Han Chinese in Xinjiang, is a two-hour delayed time imposed by the state in order to have the whole of China within the same time zone. Uyghurs, among other groups from the same region such as Kazaks and Uzbeks, use the local time as a form of "indigeneity to the territory" (Finley 2013:140). Finley's respondents explained that those Uyghurs who now use "Beijing time" are Uyghurs *minkaohan* (Uyghurs educated in Mandarin) as it goes well together with them speaking Chinese and working in state-run institutions together with Hans (*ibid.* 352). Thus, the issue of time becomes another boundary that separates the Uyghurs from the state and the majority people.

NATIONAL UNITY AND AUTONOMY
In addition to contradictory views of the Xinjiang territory the Chinese government has continued to promote national unity and minority uniqueness among all the 56 officially recognised ethnic groups. However, there are certain issues about whether the current law of the autonomy in Xinjiang is ratified or not, what rights the ethnic people who live in Xinjiang have, as well as what is necessary, according to the CCP, for the integration and assimilation of the the Uyghurs. These issues will be developed further in this section.

During a conference on ethnic issues and national unity in Xinjiang in 2014 the president Xi Jinping spoke of the importance of the ethnic minorities correctly understanding the culture of the nation and for all to respect differences, practice inclusiveness and to celebrate diversity in 'the big family' that is the Chinese nation. The president also emphasised the significance of guiding all people of all nationalities to firmly establish a correct outlook on the motherland and its national history (Ding 2014). These "spiritual issues" must be resolved, through minority educational campaigns, which shall "plant the seed of loving China deep within each child's heart", and at the same time party members must "clearly oppose every type of wrong thought and ideas" (Tiezzi 2014). The president also added that it is crucial for the country to use the law to protect this national identity, to enhance the

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[19] The WUC has since its creation placed a lot of effort into pressuring the Chinese government to release individual political prisoners. A recent example is the teacher and high-profile champion of Uyghur rights, Ilham Tohti, who was sentenced to life in prison on charges of separatism in 2014 (Liu 2014).

legal awareness of the masses of all ethnic groups, and finally to consciously safeguard the highest interests of the country (Ding 2014). This is one of many examples of the CCP's rhetoric concerning China's inviolability, but it also show how important the issues of identity in Xinjiang are to the party.

This stance of a united nation and a central government has lead to a tense relationship between the diaspora group and the CCP, as many Uyghurs believe that, they do not possess any political autonomy within the current system (Finley 2013:20). As Xinjiang is a autonomous region it falls under the China's Regional Ethnic Autonomy Law which states that governance in such regions should display "the state's full respect for and guarantee of ethnic minorities' right to administer their internal affairs and its adherence to the principle of equality, unity and common prosperity for all nationalities" (Xinhua 2014). This legal policy of autonomy does not appear in many state statements about the unrest in Xinjiang. The WUC, on the other hand, frequently argue that violence in the region is a direct result of the Chinese regime not ratifying the law and in turn, repressing the Uyghur peoples' rights (Tiezzi 2013). This has also been the cause of many protests among Uyghur activists who express discontent over the principle of hegemony exercised by the state (Bovingdon 2010:40-1).

The central government in Beijing has, since the 1990s, primarily approached instability in XUAR with extensive economic reforms and investments. While standards of living for some Uyghurs have risen, mainly in the cities, there is a broad perception that Uyghurs enjoy less access to economic opportunities than Han. An example is Uyghur unemployment, which runs high despite the booming Xinjiang economy (Adams 2012). The unequal economic status between the Han and the Uyghurs, together with the absence of the right to self-determination, has resulted in a protective response by Uyghurs, to defend their identity. Defence of the identity, by making sure that the land that represents the self, the religion and the meaning of the identity (Northrup 1989:68), has in the case of Xinjiang become violent. Seytoff predicts that because "China is unwilling to change its repressive policies in East Turkestan the bloody incidents that have plagued the region in recent years will continue, and even get worse" (Tiezzi 2013). The WUC, have in several statements condemned any violence exercised by Uyghurs, yet Seytoff's statement points to a strong frustration over the continuation of contestation over autonomy.

CULTURE AND RELIGION
The Chinese state is a self-proclaimed atheist state that constitutionally "respects all religions and promotes religious freedom" (Millward 2007:342). However, what is often added to the CCP's statements is that it is only "normal" religious activities that are acceptable (Hua 2014). What is considered normal is not explicitly developed, yet one can

infer certain attitudes through policies such as the prohibition of children under the age of 18 attending mosques. This impacts Uyghurs who, as Muslims, have practiced their faith for hundreds of years – making it the central part of Uyghur identity. This section will examine the contestation of religion and culture. The discussion is divided into three parts: *Religious Prayer*, *Clothing and Appearances*, and *Food and Traditions*.

RELIGIOUS PRAYER

The CCP express strong disagreement with accusations from Uyghurs and the international media of oppression of religion and disadvantaged minorities. However there are recent examples of religious discrimination in Xinjiang state-run organisations. For instance when searching for new law enforcement in the city of Kashgar people with "strong religious" ideas were not eligible for a job as a police officer (Palmer 2014). Another example is a notice released by the Shayar County government that detailed rewards up to 50,000 Yuan for notifying authorities of suspicious conduct of 18 different religious activities, among them customary practices, such as wearing "bizarre religious clothing" (WUC 2014b). The contested area of clothing will be discussed in a separate section, as it has become a central feature of the conflict. Further, regulations on the use of Internet, mobile devices or digital publishing to disseminate religiously motivated material deemed to undermine national unity and social stability in included (WUC 2014a).

Many of Finley's respondents said that even though law forbids them to attend the mosque, as they are under-aged, they do. The findings from Finley's research also show that those students, who are forbidden to pray in school, chose to pray at their family home or if they are alone in their dorms at school. In accordance with Dillion (2004), Finley argues that there is a revival of Islam among the Uyghurs, a renewal that embodies a search for religious and cultural purity as well as the mosque as a "Han-free" environment, where Uyghur can build trust between each other (Finley 2013:279). A respondent explains,

> *I think it's because they [Han Chinese] control us in all other spheres of our lives. You know, we are not allowed to have religion, to pray, in our working lives or at school. [The mosque is] the place where we can breathe a sigh of relief [and] we feel over-joyed to see each other* (*ibid.*)

The mosque is a crucial place for Uyghur identity, and many express a concern with the surveillance of their religious activities and they view Islam as "the sole remaining certainty in a society which allows them no space" (Finley 2013:281).

The diaspora community argue that the Chinese state consistently stretches the definition of religious extremism to cover typical religious practices and thus dilute Uyghur culture (WUC 2014). For them, the solidarity to Islam is what, in many ways, ties the Uyghur

community together and connects them to the rest of the Muslim world (Forced Migration 2007). As Millward notes, there are different strains of Islam among the Uyghur. For some it is a secularised cultural identity, for others it a Sunni Muslim tradition and a small group still engage in a traditional Sufi[20] practice that involves shrine pilgrimages, music, and chanting (Millward 2007). In many ways, this is an example of the intractability of the conflict, as the government continues to put restrictions on a central part of Uyghur identity, Uyghurs as a group, in turn, feel threatened and enforce their religious identity.

CLOTHING AND APPEARANCES
One of the salient identity makers in the conflict is clothing and appearance. In this section, the more recent restrictions of this area of identity imposed by the government will be presented and discussed from a Uyghur perspective.

Finley observed an increase of women wearing full veils or headscarves tied beneath the chin in the early 2000s, which is confirmed by her respondents who claim that it is mostly younger women who adhere to a more Islamic interpretation of the Qur'an (Finley 2013:242). Conversations that Finley has had with dozens of young Uyghur men and women make clear that only a tiny minority of the Uyghurs are turning to radical interpretations of Islam. On the contrary, women (as well as men) attach a range of different meanings to head and body coverings.

> *For some young women, the veil is a sign of membership in a modern, transnational Muslim community, while others see it as primarily a fashion statement or symbol of Uyghur identity. For many, the decision to veil is a personal matter that often follows marriage and conforms to Islamic injunctions for female modesty. Other Uyghur refuse to cover their heads and consider "imported" styles perversions of Uyghur culture and tradition. In short, although a significant number of Uyghur have embraced more formulaic Islamic practices, the community continues to debate the boundaries of its identity just like other Muslim communities across the globe.* (Grose & Leibold 2015)

Local authorities banned 'Five People'[21] from going on public transport in 2014 in north Xinjiang. The restriction included women wearing veils, jilbab or hijab, men with long beards, and even clothing with a crescent moon and stars on them (features of the East Turkestan flag). The reason for such a ban was the strengthening of public transport safety and "to ensure overall social and political stability and the safety of life and property of the people of all ethnic groups" (*ibid.*). This statement came from local authorities in Qaramay city, and Ghulja, in August 2014 and the ban is said to have been lifted in September. The

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[20] Sufism is a direction within Islam that refers to mystical beliefs and practices of different Sufi orders.
[21] See picture of the poster for the restrictions in appendix 2.

statement came to the attention of the international community through a leaked propaganda directive from the central government "where news websites where instructed to play down this story" (Aljazeera 2015). In addition, there were "proud reports" during 2014 from local police stations, reporting on confiscations of large amount of hijabs and jilbabs (Ying 2014).

The temporary prohibition of 'extremist religious clothing' was not the end of the authorities' initiative to constrain Muslims in Xinjiang. The latest policy that places restrictions on the practise of Islam is a total ban of the use of full-faced Islamic veil and body covering from all public spaces in the provincial capital, Urumqi. The act came into force on the 1st of February 2015, with a fine of 2000-5000 Yuan (the average monthly wage in Xinjiang being around 1310 Yuan[22]) if the restriction is not followed. Again, the policy implemented due to security reasons: the government claim that the clothes hinder security personnel from identifying individuals. A statement by the regional government also concluded that full-face veils and full-body coverings are associated with religious extremism. The definition in the regulation of the forbidden conduct is *mengmian zhaopa,* which translate to "to mask the face (and/or cover the body) with a robe" (Wang 2015 & Urumqi Government 2015). The new regulation also prohibits the populations from wearing clothing, emblems, objects, memorabilia, logos, or symbols that propagate religious extremism (Grose & Leibold 2015). In this way the new policy fails to accept the nuanced symbols of Uyghur culture and the Islamic faith in Xinjiang, where there is a variety of veiling practices, by creating vague and imprecise regulations. This governmental policy, like many others, contests and discredits significance of religious symbols and instead presents it as a fashion choice.

The restrictions on certain clothing are not new in XUAR. Uyghur students and workers in state-run companies have long complained that Muslims are discouraged from wearing traditional religious clothing during working hours. Over the past three years, there has been an increase in reporting of protests against these restrictions. In 2013 high school students in western Xinjiang took to the streets to protest the ban of girls wearing traditional headscarves in school (Mundel 2013). In spring 2014 local officials confirmed that at least two protesters had been shot dead. A township in the Aksu prefecture witnessed 100 Uyghurs protesting against the detention of women and middle school girls for wearing headscarves. Another case was in Kucha were police were said to have fired on protesters as they threatened to storm a government building in Alaqagha township following the detention of 25 Uyghur women and girls who had refused government instructions to uncover their faces partly covered by their headscarves (Finney 2014). This

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[22] The salary is an average among all sub-regions in Xinjiang. The average for urban areas where predominately Uyghurs live is lower around 1240 Yuan/month (Zito, Yao and Chen 2014). The calculations do not include rural areas.

is yet another factor which gives the Uyghurs a reason to show resistance to the Chinese way of ruling.

In 2012 a Uyghur of the Xinjiang delegation, which attended the 18th National Congress[23], said that there has never been a ban on Islamic clothing but that "we are now in a civilised society and we hope to use modern culture to guide a somehow backward culture. It is something not to be forced, but something to be achieved through guidance" (Li 2012). This is representative of the rhetoric presented by the CCP over the past 20 years – that is; there is religious freedom under Chinese rule, but this freedom is also restricted a push towards modernisation and civilisation. Further, such statements of Uyghur culture being regressive again demean their identity and their way of life, and in turn fuel the conflict between the state and the Uyghurs.

The authorities have justified restrictions on clothing and appearance as a way of "keeping the region stable" but also by claiming that Islamic clothing is "abnormal" attire. Government-linked experts have said that wearing veils, black robes and even growing beards has not been part of the religious or cultural traditions of Uyghur people. They perceive it is a relatively new local phenomenon, claiming that the numbers of individuals wearing veils and long beards has grown rampantly following the ethnic clashes in Urumqi in 2009 (Li 2012). These new patterns of expression of identity, are said to be planned by extremist and terrorist who wish to split the Chinese state and to incite ethnic unrest (Aljazeera 2015). The WUC have responded by expressing great concern over the Chinese way of dealing with religion, saying that their actions are "excessive intrusions into personal religious lives" (WUC 2014b). Regardless of the reasons, if what several sources have argued is true and there has been an increase in veiling practise among Uyghurs (Bovingdon 2010, Li 2012, Finley 2013), then it could be considered an example of how representation of identity can change fairly quickly in response to outside influence as a defence of ones identity.

Policies not only include restrictions, but also encouragements on how do dress. A clear example is the five-year, $8 million "Beauty Project" that was launched in Xinjiang in 2011. It is a state-run campaign that aspires to promote ethnic beauty and celebrate the diversity of cultures in Xinjiang (Zhu 2011). The project involves fashion shows, pageants, and lectures where ethnic women display the traditional clothing, and the beauty of their minority culture, which has also involved development of the fashion and cosmetic industry in Xinjiang. The campaign's main aim is to educate minority women with leading messages such as patriotism, cultural development and getting rid of "old ideas" by "making their beautiful hair float, and expose their pretty faces" (Tianshan Wang 2012). At the same time

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[23] The National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party is held every 5 years; it is the highest body within the party.

local authorities have put up notice boards including "encouraging" phrases for women, some examples are "Get rid of head scarves; change ugly customs", "Let a pretty face be exposed to beautiful hair; take off the veil, change customs" and "Ladies please unveil your headscarves, please don't affect a modern civilized society" (Boxun Xinwen Wang 2012). In opposition to the aim of the "Beauty Project" these messages clearly aspire not to celebrate the culture and beauty of minority women but to fit the cultures with in certain norms.

FOOD AND TRADITIONS

An important part of Uyghur identity is the local cuisine that also has made an impact on mainstream culture in Xinjiang. Despite this impact, the questions of food and Uyghur traditions have become a contested area in the conflict.

Food is a salient boundary of Uyghur identity as Halal prepared food is the acceptable diet, which means that most Uyghurs do not eat in Han managed restaurants (Rudelson 1997:62) – though Finley found that these, what she calls, spatial boundaries constantly were negotiated and that Uyghurs often ate in Han managed restaurant that served Halal prepared food (Finley 2013:152-3). Further, Rudelson speculates that Han, in general, are not used to the taste of mutton, which is the staple meat eaten by Uyghurs, and Han rarely eat in Uyghur restaurants as they believe that "they are not clean" (Rudelson 1997:63). A clear marker between the two groups and the boundary of Uyghur identity is the choice of eating or not eating pork. One respondent told Finley "a Uyghur will not eat pork, although the Han do. If a Uyghur ate pork, he would no longer be a Uyghur" (Finley 2013:153).

Apart from a Halal diet, Ramadan, and other religious festivals, are seen as a central part of Uyghur culture (WUC 2011). A severe breach of trust between the government and the Uyghurs came, in 2008, when the regional government in Xinjiang implemented limitations on Ramadan by banning fasting at the workplace during Ramadan, meaning Uyghurs were forced to eat during work hours and enforcing "food check-ups" in cafeterias. Workers also had to sign a written pledge that they would not fast with local authorities demanding demanded that local Halal restaurants remain open during Ramadan. The same ban was enforced in 2009 and the CCP then offered food and drinks at schools and other local institutions (Martina 2014) with the rationale of maintaining stability during the holy month.

In 2014, there were again several reports from different cities in Xinjiang that local cadres, teachers and students were forbidden to fast. The reason given this time was that civil

servants, students, and CCP members were not allowed to take part in religious activities[24]. A number of local governments and school websites posted notices saying that students and workers were not allowed to take part in fasting and that they should "guide family members and friends to act in line with the law and fight against illegal religious activities" (Jie 2014). It was noted that in several of the articles related to Ramadan and the restrictions on the fasting, the words "enemy" and "extremism" were also mentioned (Wen 2010). The WUC frequently address issues of connecting religious practices with extremism and have condemned the Chinese government for treating Uyghur culture as being of wrongful nature (WUC 2014a, 2015b).

Beijing's explanation of the ban presents little understanding of how they view Uyghur culture. Contradicting statements by the state's official English news media Xinhua claim that they encourage teachers, civil servants and students to eat properly for studying and work purposes, but that they do not force anyone to eat who does not want to. Additionally, Xinhua's Chinese version has published several articles discussing the negative consequences of fasting (Tang 2014). These articles suggest that far from a religious aspect, the Chinese government only wants Chinese citizens to be healthy and achieve their potential. At the same time, such statements neglect to respect any cultural aspect of food and the importance of Ramadan to the Uyghur people.

Music is one of the areas, apart from food, where Uyghurs have a positive reputation in wider Chinese culture. Uyghur music is one of the corner stones in Uyghur culture as shown by a common Uyghur expression "'when a child can walk, he can dance. When a child can speak, he can sing'" (Finley 2013:187). Music comes across as almost an innate ability of the Uyghur and a central part of identity. In addition, music has, according to Bovingdon, also become a source of resistance for the Uyghur people, by including political lyrics of discontent. However, since a few years back the government require Uyghur artists to submit their lyrics for censorship before publicly preforming or recording the songs (Bovingdon 2010:95). Another centre point of Uyghur identity is traditional gatherings, which according to Uyghurs have been a part of Uyghur culture since ancient times. For example the traditional gathering called *mäshräp[25]*, usually includes story telling, music making and feasts. Though the government banned "illicit" traditional male *mäshräp* in the mid-late 1990s, as it sometimes was conducted to maintain a Uyghur national culture (Millward 2007:16-7). When prohibiting male Uyghurs from partaking in such rituals, the CCP actively try to stop any indication of Uyghur nationalism.

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[24] Such restriction on CCP members part-taking in religious activities was introduced in the mid-90s, as the two sides of freedom, presented in the religion section of this paper, dose not include party members – their right is "to not believe in religion" (Millward 2007:342).
[25] *Mäshräp* is on UNESCO's list of "Intangible Cultural Heritage"(Palmer 2015).

Uyghur diaspora aside from the WUC, focus on strengthening the collective Uyghur identity than political autonomy. Social media is increasingly used to connect with Uyghurs all over the world. There is not any specialised social networking site for Uyghurs, but the online community is vast. Folklore, music and dancing are some of the main themes posted on YouTube by Uyghur diaspora, both in English and in Uyghur, as a way of communicating a positive image of the Uyghurs to a global audience. The use of social media has lead to kinship among Uyghur diaspora both concerning human rights, but also solidarity through Islam (Vergani & Zuev 2011:228). It is also believed that Uyghur youths in Xinjiang are influenced by the diaspora movement, in terms of both pan-Turkic identity and the preservation of Uyghur traditions and language, but that since the Internet is still very restricted, by the government, their contact is limited (Finley 2013:xxvii).

LANGUAGE

Uyghurs, in Xinjiang, have in several studies and news articles demonstrating the preference for their mother tongue over speaking Mandarin. They have done this "by making clear distinctions between the domestic and external environment", and emphasising the times when they spoke Uyghur willingly in their homes and times when they had to speak Mandarin in public (Yee 2005 in Finley 2013:135). Finley defines language as a symbolic boundary of Uyghurs identity (*ibid.* 146). The Uyghur language becomes a powerful symbolic boundary, both as a connection to a wider pan-Turkic identity, as Uyghur is a Turkic language, and to a narrower symbol of Uyghur identity (Yee 2005:452). Yee's research showed that 55 per cent of the Uyghur respondents stated that the policies aimed to promote Uyghur language had not been successfully implemented in the region (Yee 2003:48). This section treats the area of language, both by discussing the Uyghurs use of their mother tongue and the CCP's strife for a bilingual[26] minority population.

Since the 1950's, the CCP has permitted and even encouraged education in Uyghur in Xinjiang. In order to eliminate illiteracy and during almost 50 years, Uyghur-language education was available from primary school up to university. In connection to the first 'Strike Hard' campaign in 1996, aimed to catch criminals who were threatening the unity of the Chinese nation, the CCP's Central Committee published what is known as the "Document No. 7". Apart from addressing issues of extremists and separatists and international influence[27], the document treats the issue of the lack of control over Uyghur-language education. The document includes warnings of teachers and textbooks that "inspire

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[26] Bilingual, in this case, refers to a minority that fluently speaks both Mandarin (*Putonghua)* and a native minority language.

[27] For example, it included recommendation on security from the Politiburo Standard Committee on how to deal with "'illegal religious activities' aided by 'international counter-revolutionary forced led by the United States of America'" (Millward 2007:342).

national separatism and publicise religious ideas" (Millward 2007:331,342). The security policies have prolonged since its implementation and the WUC has frequently cited the language restrictions as a chief grievance for the Uyghurs (Guang & Debata 2010:76, WUC 2015b).

Although the Uyghurs retain autonomy, the Uyghur language has to "share space and resources with Standard Chinese in the domains of government administration, the courts, education, and the media" (Dwyer 2005:2). Language policies in the 21st century within education have evidently placed restrictions on Uyghur language. Most textbooks are now only offered in Chinese, even though the constitution of autonomous law states that classes with students of minority nationalities shall "use textbooks in their own languages, and use their languages as the media of instruction". Further, in 2002, Xinjiang University in Urumqi, decided to stop offering courses in Uyghur (*ibid* 35). Thus, many Uyghurs express discontent over such policies, as it is seen as an assault on their culture (*ibid.* 2).

The CCP have frequently stressed the importance of bilingual education for minority children, as it will contribute more to national unity (Zhang H. 2014). For example the document *Opinions on Strengthening and Improving Ethnic Work in New Situations*, released by the central government in 2014, called on ethnic minority officials to master Mandarin Chinese. The document also urged Han officials to learn the local dialects of the areas where they work; encouraging and allowing experienced Han officials to help govern "ethnically-diverse regions" (Xinhua 2014). The essence of guidelines are that Beijing wants to increase feelings of inclusion and participation among ethnic minorities, yet it seems that this is not the case if it means sacrificing central control. However, there are reports suggesting that this increased mandarin-focused bilingual education in Xinjiang has had a negative effect on ethnic minority languages, as students are not encouraged to speak their native tongue (CECC 2010). For example, in the spring of 2013 southern Xinjiang experienced student protests against the lack of signs and instruction in Uyghur at their school (Mundle 2013).

Finley notes that many Uyghurs feel forced to master Chinese in order to compete with the Han on the job market, especially Uyghurs in the southern part of Xinjiang, who rarely interact with Han Chinese (Finley 2013:139). While Uyghurs in XUAR are struggling with accepting the law of bilingual education the diaspora community also face the challenge as they strive to pass on the mother language to the second generations migrants. There is a notable awareness among Uyghurs, both in and outside of XUAR, as they find it crucial to preserve their native language (Vergani & Zuev 2011:207). The WUC engage with different human rights organisations to spread their message. An example is the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the 'International Mother Language Day', who published a report on mother language-based education. As a response, WUC calls for "increased inclusiveness for minority and indigenous languages so that

cultures may continue to thrive within their own space" and aim to raise awareness about the current linguistic injustice of China's "'bilingual'" policy (WUC 2015b).

INTRAGROUP DYNAMICS
The purpose of this next section is to explore the internal differences and boundary-making between the Uyghurs in the context of the Xinjiang Conflict.

In an interview with Aljazeera, the WUC spokesman Seytoff answers the question "who are the Uyghurs?" by saying that "number one we, Uyghurs, are not Chinese historically, […] we do not look like them, […] we are a 'minority' under Han rule and we have no autonomy at all" (Aljazeera 2015). The quote emphasises the strong feeling, among both the Uyghur diaspora and the local Uyghurs, that Uyghur identity is in strong contrast to the dominant group Han Chinese. The leaders of the CCP have, on the other hand, since the creation of the republic spent much effort in "transforming the heterogeneous peoples and lands previously governed by the Qing Empire into a unified nation-state" (Bovingdon 2010:159). This section will examine the possibility of 'self'-'other' divide within a group and seek to explore the intragroup dynamics of the Uyghur identity.

Finley expresses a concern regarding the claim that the Chinese government 'created' Uyghur identity through classification in the 1930s. Finley argues that by focusing on the boundary between the Chinese state and Uyghurs one disregards any possibility of a coherent Uyghur identity prior to incorporation of Xinjiang into the PRC (Finley 2013:3). In line with Eriksen (1993), Finley considers identity as "selected by group members themselves" (Finley 2013:7) and is therefore constructed from within the group. Her research points to a strong intragroup identity among the Uyghurs that emphasises the Uyghur identity as more than the ethnonym created by the Chinese hegemonic discourse. Uyghur identity is, according to Finley, based on the shared history, common cultural assumptions, religious practice and an attachment to the land that over the 500 years have shaped, focused and intensified the Uyghur identity, following the conversion to Islam (*ibid.* 6-7).

Another scholar who has examined the intragroup dynamics of Uyghur identity is Rudelson. Rudelson's research separates the Uyghur identity into geographically placed groups, and explains that the social groups within the Uyghur community are divided based on "occupation not family type, decent, or pan-oasis[28] solidarity" (Rudelson 1997:168). The identity markers are therefore constructed in relation to other Uyghurs rather than the Han or the Kazaks. Rudelson's finding suggests a divisions of three groups; intellectuals, merchants and peasants. According to his study, the middle-income and poor peasants

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[28] The idea of a pan-oasis identity is defined as and identity that is shared between different oasis.

identify strongly with Islam while the merchants, and wealthier peasants, who might travel the country, are more likely to identify themselves as citizens of the Chinese state. The third group named intellectuals identify themselves as a part of (and the idea of) a multicultural citizenship of the PRC, with ties to the Turkic world of the Central Asia and Turkey. While the Xinjiang Conflict has prolonged, some Uyghurs "have gravitated to Islamist ideology that condemns Sufism and condones political violence" (Millward 2014), and they have strengthened the identification with other Islamic movements around the world.

This internal negotiation of identity does not necessarily divide the Uyghur community but it shows the hybridity of Uyghur identity. The dynamics of the Uyghur identity are more than an imposed classification of a minority people, with a particular language, costumes and appearance. Further, Rudelson's research indicated that the three groups all have ties to their home community/village, which they return to for social gatherings and cultural events. In fact, he writes that his respondents were more likely to identify themselves as Turpanlik[29] rather than Uyghur or Turk (Rudelson 1997:117-8). This identification with 'Home', is according to Finley a selected spatial boundary that has also spread to urban cities where "old towns" are dominated by Uyghurs and the newly build areas, referred to as "new towns", are dominated by Han (Finley 2013:147).

Finley's research also presents evidence for hybrid Uyghur identity, but that has been constructed in relation to the dominant Han Chinese society. At the same time as many Uyghurs emphasise a strict orthodox Islamic practise other Uyghurs are "unskilled in their mother tongue or culture". Finley distinguishes two distinct groups, the *minkaohan*, Uyghurs educated in Mandarin, and the *minkaomin*, Uyghurs educated in their own language[30] (Finley 2013:Chapter 7). According to Palmer, this divide has created intragroup polarisation because "*minkaomin* education is not taken seriously by non-Uyghur employers, and not speaking Mandarin shuts *minkaomin* graduates out of jobs. In turn, they often resent *minkaohan* students as opportunistic and unfaithful to their own heritage" (Palmer 2014).

These intragroup differences construct contemporary Uyghur identity, and as in many multicultural societies, the negotiation of such hybrid identities is on-going. In contrast to these social identities there is little information about political diversification and organised political engagement by Uyghurs. As mentioned, no research has been found on the subject of grassroots organisations that aims to promote Uyghur civil and political rights (Chinese and Western media mainly report on individual cases of activists). The reason for this can only be speculated on, but this paper believes that due to the extensive control of political

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[29] Turpanlik is an oasis identity based on the Turpan prefecture in east Xinjiang (Rudelson 1997:117).
[30] Similar distinctions are also made for other minority groups. *Minkaohan* denotes a minority individual who revived a Mandarin-medium education and whose first language is Mandarin (Finley 2013:xxvi).

organisations, as well as on independent grassroots organisations, many refrain from expressing political views or action, or may do it in quiet, "behind closed doors". The result of self-censorship may contribute to intragroup tensions when some choose an out-spoken political identity that may consider direct actions the only way to sustain their identity, and those who prefer discussing in private and maybe 'surviving' within the system.

In diasporic communities, political non-violent engagement is common (Orjuela 2011), and this is also the case for much of the Uyghur diaspora. During an assembly of a group of Uyghurs in Washington DC in 2004, the Easter Turkestan Government in Exile (ETGIE) was formed. With an elaborate leadership structure their mission was to protect the rights of the people of Eastern Turkestan Republic until they were liberated from the imperial rule of the Chinese Communist Party and the republic could be established. However, the organisation has not received any official recognition by the United States or internationally. Their work has since then involved demonstrations, issuing news reports and writing letters to politicians and international bodies on behalf of the Uyghur people (Bovingdon 2010:151-2), which is similar to the work of the transnational diaspora organisation the World Uyghur Congress. The Uyghur diaspora community is quite small and the contact with the local Uyghurs is more restricted now, mostly due to increased control of the Internet and the Chinese borders. In addition, moving back to the homeland is not on the agenda of the overwhelming majority of Uyghur diaspora (Forced migration 2007). The gap between, the Uyghur diasporas, with their access to avenues for international political engagement and the increased advocacy for a symbolical solution of a separate state, and the day-to-day endeavours in the homeland to survive in circumstances of current Chinese rule seems futile.

The Chinese government also adds to the intragroup dynamics of Uyghur identity. For example, the state-run television network CCTV, on behalf of local authorities, has sought to involve the Uyghur population in the fight against extremism. By encouraging tip-offs, the authorities hope to include all groups to bring stability to the region. The encouragements include Uyghurs giving tips to the police about criminal and terrorist activities, claiming that information from the Uyghur public are instrumental in the manhunt of the three evils "terrorists, separatists and extremists". To further promote this call, CCTV also interviewed several Uyghur (their identities being protected) who described how they helped surround suspects, in order for the police to make arrests (Zhang N. 2014). These pleas to the Uyghurs to assist the government in the battle against violent groups might be understood as a tactic by the government to divide the Uyghur community rather than promoting inclusion. Such a tactic could backfire and instead bring Uyghurs further from identifying themselves with the CCP and the Chinese nation.

FINAL DISCUSSION

This section presents a discussion on how the Uyghur identity has been contested and constructed in the Xinjiang Conflict, based on the result of the text analysis.

Before discussing the areas of contestation it is important to consider the access to and control of information, which the Chinese government has. During the course of this research it became evident that the CCP has monopoly on what is said in national, and to some extent international media, as well as of the scope of which researchers may access problematic areas. This has given the CCP the upper hand in the debate and also allowed the party to shape the mainstream debate of the issues in the conflict. The 'illegality' of spreading propaganda against the Chinese state, has in many ways affected the negotiation of Uyghur identity, as it allows the government to shape the perception of Uyghurs and therefore also their identity.

Several researchers (Dillion 2004, Bovingdon 2010, Finley 2013) have encountered a strong emphasis on the uniqueness and distinctiveness of Uyghur identity by Uyghurs, especially in comparison to the Han Chinese. The focus of many Uyghurs lie upon the cultural features that separate the two groups, and the emphasis is often on the superiority of these markers, for example the Uyghurs' ability to dance, sing and socialise. The Uyghur and the WUC have as well continuously emphasised their strong relationship to the land, making it a clear boundary to the Han Chinese who are viewed as colonisers. This paper recognises that the Uyghurs in Xinjiang have emphasised features of their identity, such as their Halal diet and celebration of Ramadan, and used these to separate themselves from, or build a boundary against, the Han Chinese. As such, one can conclude that there has been an increasing emphasis on religious features of the Uyghur identity. Similar to Finley's discussion on the three-part process of boundary-making and negotiation (symbolic, spatial and social in 2013:Chapter 3) between Han and Uyghurs, the results of this study suggest that the boundary-making and negotiation between the Chinese state and the Uyghurs is manifested in various areas of contestation.

In line with much of the existing research on diaspora, this study has suggested a political agenda of diaspora groups. In coherence with Chen's findings (2011) this paper has seen a construction of a political identity of the Uyghur diaspora that has been a unifying force for their mobilisation. Even though some concerns of the diminished use of the mother tongue and other cultural traits is expressed by Uyghur diaspora, most of the activism of the WUC is political. The WUC has engaged with the international community, through lobbying for the release of Uyghur prisoners, writing articles about the injustices they perceive exist against the Uyghurs, and engaging in debates with representatives of the Chinese state. Much of the literature published by the WUC does not focus on defining Uyghur diaspora in a context of the host country, but rather, on maintaining and strengthening the boundary of

Uyghur identity in China. It seems, from this study, that the diaspora has constructed an identity that is strongly connected to the myth of the homeland and, similar to the collective identity of Uyghurs in China, an identity in opposition to the Han majority.

As the conflict in Xinjiang has continued, state news items about unrest or new policies in Xinjiang have ceased to include the word 'Uyghur'. Items instead speak of 'people of Xinjiang' and continuously stress the significance of unity and stability. At the same time, the Uyghurs are described as nomads that have inhabited different areas (Xinhua 2003) articulating a perception of the Uyghurs as somewhat rootless without the Chinese united identity. The CPP has negotiated and exerted a dichotomous boundary-making of Uyghur identity by, on the one hand, saying that they accept all minority cultures, which exercise "normal" religious activities, such as Ramadan, but at the same time encouraging workers and students to eat healthily and placing restrictions on fasting during working hours.

Another area of contestation is language. The CCP has focused on the importance of bilingualism, especially with concern to Uyghurs learning Mandarin. The issue here is whether language is negotiated with the aim of integration and inclusion or assimilation. If the laws prohibits Uyghur from being spoken in state-run institutions, but at the same time promotes bilingual education for primary Uyghur students and Han officials, a paradox arises regarding boundary-making. One can at least reveal yet another contradiction – if children are encouraged to speak their mother tongue in schools but later are forced to only speak the dominate language at work or university – which is worthy of further investigation to determine how the negotiation of the individual, and communities identity changes.

While the CCP intensely focuses on economic development as the sole development project in XUAR, it neglects the Uyghurs' fight for religious and cultural rights. This is because the rhetoric of the Chinese state displays great interest in raising the cultural and civilizational level of the Uyghur people by promising equality and power sharing within a "big Chinese family" (Harrell 1995:35). However, this is not showing in practise. An example is the heavy emphasis on economic development during China's Central Committee Conference on Ethnic Affairs, in 2014. Rather than focusing on ethnic relations and minority rights the state again demonstrated a continuous focus on stability incorporated in economic reforms in XUAR. The CCP therefore, contest Uyghur identity by ignoring the Uyghurs' call for equality and assume economic reforms will solve the instability in the region. Here, the Han seeing themselves as a superior group with economic and political power, where the CCP leadership may help the under-developed Uyghurs to advance and become a more developed people, constructs a boundary between the Uyghurs and the Han.

While the CCP has officially denied any marginalisation of the Uyghurs, it seems as if their concerns of instability in the region are directed "less against any *actual* harmful and 'subversive' consequences, marginal at best, of the Uyghurs' actions and more against their symbolic context" (Shichor 2003:304). The findings of this study have indeed indicated that the conflict is played out in a wide range of areas where the Chinese state has contested Uyghur identity. Through policies and laws which restrict religion, culture and traditions the CCP has, "sought not only to classify and regulate ethnic diversity, but define its very content: with clothing, textbooks, and even play cards prescribing 'standard' and 'normal' customs, habits, and costumes" (Grose & Leibold 2015). This shows that the construction of Uyghur identity, by the Chinese state, in many ways could be seen as a deliberate attempt to shape the boundary of what it means to be Uyghur.

Elements of what is happening in Xinjiang can be defined as a process of 'friend-enemy' categorisation. Sen writes that people and states have failed to distinguish between "(1) [...] various affiliations and loyalties a person who happens to be a Muslim has, and (2) his or her Islamic identity in particular" (Sen 2006:61). The distinction between such varying Muslim identities becomes, according to Sen, important in a world in which Islamic fundamentalism has become more powerful, and, in which, for example the Chinese state (and Western states) "opposition to them is often combined with significant, if vaguely formulated, suspicion of Muslim people in general" (*ibid.*). The CCP's way of placing a single label of the issues in the region on 'terrorism' or that the cultural differences is due to 'Islamism' only fuel violence and hatred. This labelling process of classifying religious and cultural practices as abnormal, and associating them with acts of violence, constructs an association of the Uyghur identity with terrorism. This process has therefore influenced the construction of perceived Uyghur identity. By emphasising a 'friend-enemy' category, the CCP and the state consciously or unconsciously constructs an idea of them being the "friend", who protects the interests of the Chinese people, and the Uyghur are then perceived as the "enemy", who trying to provoke and create violence and instability. However, such a categorisation is reverse from a Uyghur perspective, as the CCP and the Han are the "enemy" which invaded their land, or which denied them rights to religious and cultural expression.

So far, this discussion has focused on prohibition, which the Chinese government has imposed on various areas of Uyghur identity. The type of 'negative labelling' as indicating that fasting is wrong, that children are not allowed to have religion, or that veiling is abnormal and not a part of Uyghur culture has limited the dynamics of what it means to be Uyghur and it has also placed 'negative attachment' to Uyghur identity. Yet, the CCP does also practise more 'positive labelling' for example by promoting minority women and their culture attire in form of the "Beauty Project" and the emphasis on bilingual education for

children. This indicates that Uyghur identity is not only constructed through what they are not allowed to do, but also based on what they are allowed to do.

Symbols of boundary-making between the Uyghurs and the Han have been emphasised by the relatively new demographic structure of XUAR. But the boundary-making might also be because these symbols have become a way in which Uyghurs protect their identity from the threat of policies, discussed in this paper, that are directed towards limiting or controlling Uyghur culture. The invalidation of the core constructs of Uyghur identity is threatening since it destroys the meaning of that very identity. However, the speculations of correlation between actions and the construction of identity are of course difficult to prove. Finley argues that the Uyghurs have actively deployed these boundaries as a means to distinguish themselves from the Han Chinese (and indirectly from the Chinese state) in "linguistic, religio-cultural and territorial terms" (Finley 2013:167). This process of boundary-making is a form of resistance, a resistance that according to Finley has, for some Uyghurs, made Islam more important and for other Uyghurs resulted in advocacy for the creation of East Turkestan (*ibid.* 263). In this case it becomes important to distinguish between direct or indirect resistance. The findings of this paper, suggest that Uyghurs and the WUC condemn violent protests and illegal activities by Uyghurs, but the violence is none the less real. This form of direct resistance toward CCP policies stands in contrast to more indirect resistance (Finley refers to this as symbolic resistance), for example the suggested revival of Islam. As a respondent said to Finley, "I suppose Islam is stronger now because the government is trying to block religious activities. If the government tries to block or limit Islam, then people's faith only becomes stronger" (*ibid.* 165).

Thus, a conclusion of this paper is that the identity of Uyghurs seems to be the effect rather than the cause of the conflict. The results suggest that all actors have contributed to this new formulation of what it means to be a Uyghur. When negotiating one's identity, in the form of resistance, the process might not necessarily be perceived as resistance, but when the practice, for example faith, is being categorised as illegal the potential for the resistance arises. The contestation of Uyghur identity markers has both led to negotiations of what they entail, but also to violent reactions in defence of that very identity. In this way the collective Uyghur identity has been constructed and reconstructed during the past 20 years. It is a product of the dynamics of the conflict.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of the Xinjiang Conflict has shown that identity can be constructed around threatened identities, historical suffering and a struggle to safeguard and protect one's identity, but that is also constructed along political or economic lines. In the conflict setting, the importance of boundaries and identity markers are brought to the fore and re-emphasised by the different actors. The analysis advanced in this paper suggests that it is important to think of grievances not so much as pristine starting points of violent conflict, detached from the wider systems of meanings in which they are embedded, but rather as areas in which wider contestation over identity are played out.

In response to the main research question 'How is Uyghur identity constructed and contested in the context of the Xinjiang Conflict?' it can be said that Uyghur identity is negotiated by the Chinese state and the Uyghur diaspora as well as among Uyghurs in Xinjiang. The process of negotiation includes resistance, boundary-making and outright conflict. This paper has presented five areas where Uyghur identity is contested, these are: (1) *Territory*, (2) *National Unity and Autonomy,* (3) *Culture and Religion,* (4) *Language,* and (5) *Intragroup Dynamics.*

The Uyghur diaspora, with the World Uyghur Congress as a representative, have negotiated their identity and constructed a political identity linked to their advocacy for civil rights for Uyghurs, and an independent East Turkestan. As mentioned, the CCP has basically discarded these claims as "vain wishes", untrue accusations and acts of terrorism and separatism. The Chinese government have restricted the expressions of Uyghur culture, and the constant emphasis on national unity appears to be a way of negotiating Uyghur identity in order for Uyghurs to abandon their attachments to their culture and later assimilate with the dominant Han Chinese culture. This study has discussed the fact that issues of marginalisation, be it restriction on clothing and food or access to the job market, influence the way in which the Uyghurs relate to the dominant Han population, and to the Chinese state. The argument here is that they all have different understandings of their identity and the identity of the others. While the constructivist approach helps to understand and explain how the identity comes into existence and why there are disagreements about seemingly primordial markers such as homeland, it is necessary to also see how the actors engaged in the conflict view identity as primordial and innate to explain why conflict continues. A more pragmatic approach, which takes both a constructivist theory and an acknowledgement that primordialism is driving the conflict, is required to obtain a more rounded understanding not only of how identity is constructed and contest but also why.

An unexpected identity marker was also identified. Earlier research has identified markers such as, language, territory and traditional rituals, which this study has recognised as well.

In the Uyghurs' case, the findings suggest that *Time* can be considered as a part of identity construction and thus a part of the boundary-making between groups. The Uyghurs negotiate and create a boundary of their identity, which separates them from the Han Chinese as they do not adhere to the Chinese states enforced time zone, whereas other Uyghurs choose to use 'Beijing time' do integrate with the Han.

A key discovery of this research is the importance of access to and control of information in the construction of perceived identities. A question raised in this research is whether and to what extent the CCP's perceived identity of the Uyghur people influences the felt identity of the Uyghurs. Investigation into the correlation between information and identity formation could provide a better understanding of how conflicts become intractable. The distorted relation between Han and Uyghur involves issues of power at a political, cultural and representational level, particularly felt through the Xinjiang Conflict. The mistrust and prejudice among the Uyghurs and Han requires further research, including the way in which the strengthening of Uyghur identity influences the construction of other identities; both of Han and local minorities. One branch of research could involve exploration as to whether Finley observations of Uyghurs seeking "a conscious segregation […] in the home, on the streets and in most social situations apart from work-related interaction" (Finley 2013:149), are applicable to other minority groups in the region.

In sum, this paper can conclude that in the Xinjiang Conflict the idea of group identity, and the "Us against Them"-thinking is clearly visible. The findings of this paper support the idea that identity is a battleground for the Xinjiang Conflict. It is therefore the contestation of specific areas of identity that are interesting rather than only considering a specific label, such as ethnicity. This paper has discussed identity in the context of the Xinjiang Conflict, from the perspective of different actors, and has therefore looked beyond a mere description of the conflict (including punishment of a group, the battle against terrorism, the lobbying for rights to territory, and the protests against discriminatory laws). It has instead connected these issues to the contestation and construction of Uyghur identity. The different actors in the Xinjiang Conflict were chosen to give different perspectives to areas where Uyghur identity is contested, such as clothing, language, autonomy and food that indirectly affect a collective group. This study has shown that it can be beneficial for identity research, as well as the study of contemporary conflicts, to not only consider the ethnic identity of warring actors, but rather to explore how these different actors understand and utilise different identity markers, and how boundaries are negotiated and maintained in the conflict.

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APPENDIX

1. MAP OF XINJIANG[31]   59
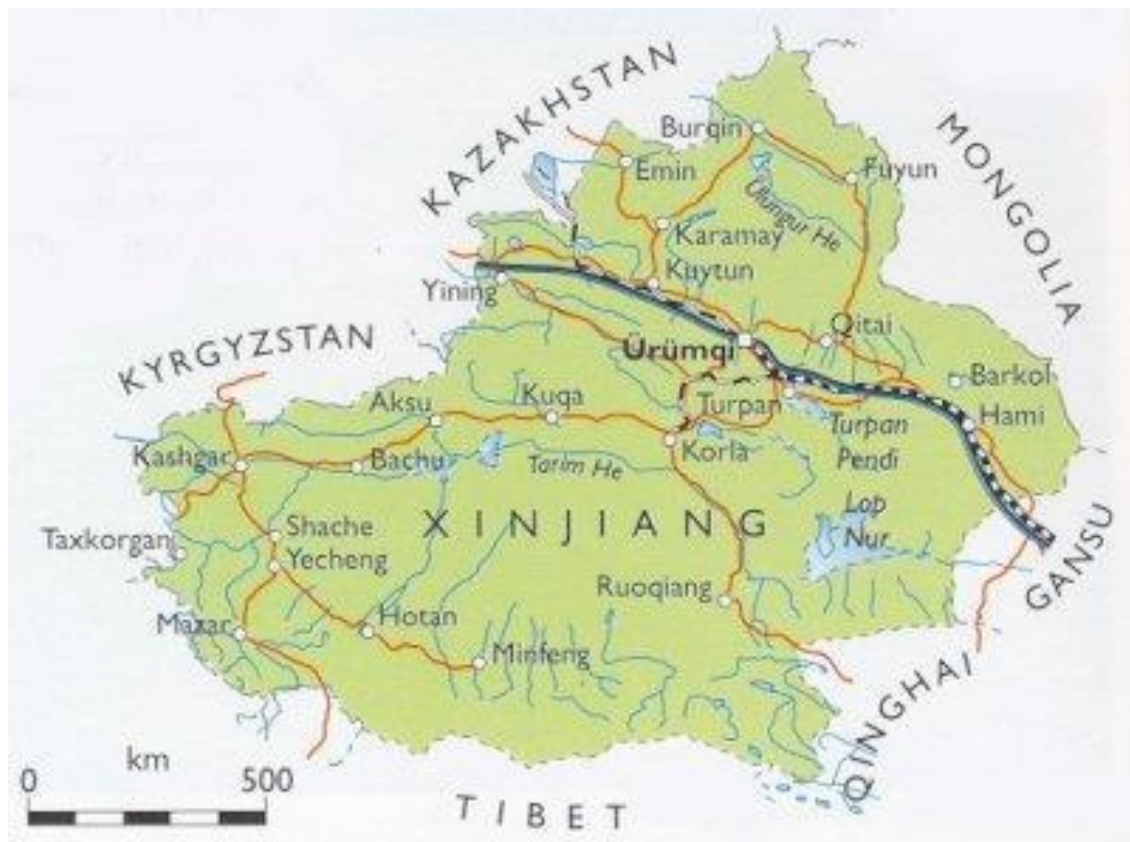
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